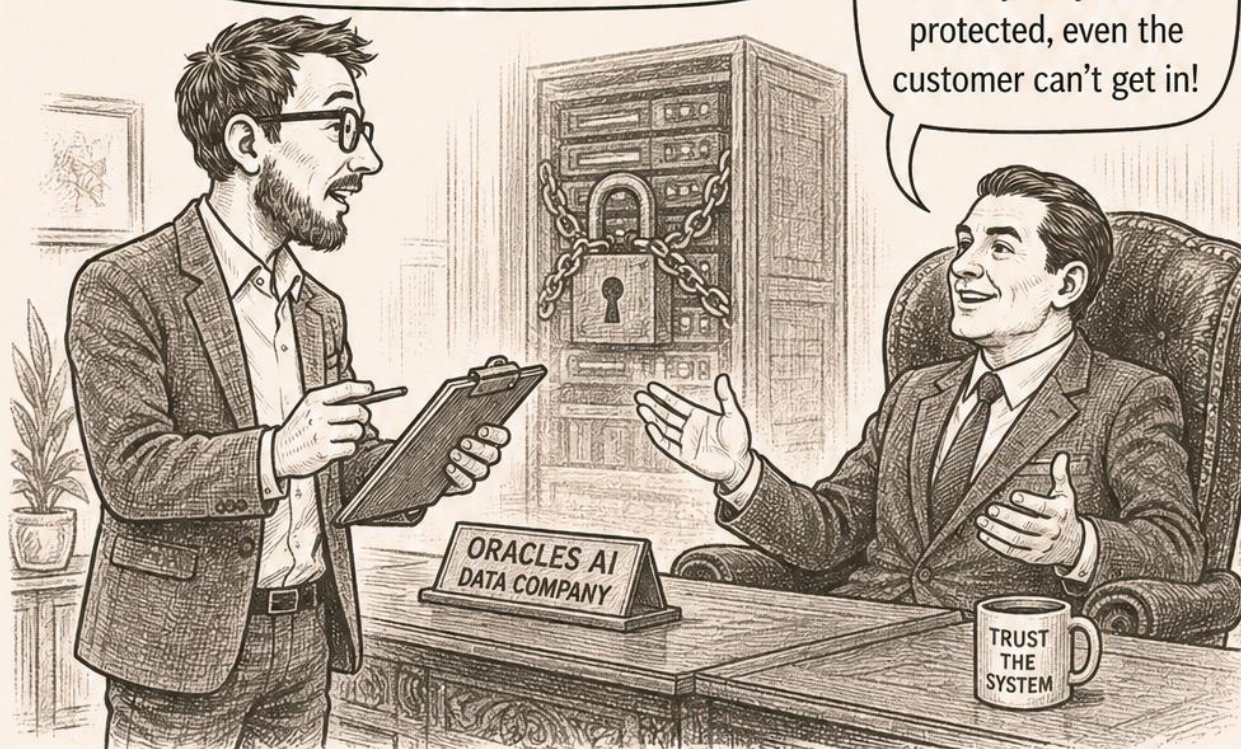


THE PROPAGANDA OF PR

by Peter Ayolov

When “Oracles” AI data Company latest update accidentally locked everyone out of their own databases, the PR lead called it a “Zero-Trust milestone.”

We’ve finally achieved the ultimate in data security: a system so protected, even the customer can’t get in!



THE MISCOMMUNICATION TRILOGY
“The Entropy of Communication, Vol. II”

SAMIZDAT, 2026

THE MISCOMMUNICATION TRILOGY
“The Entropy of Communication, Vol. II”
Part 14

THE PR OF PROPAGANDA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Introduction: Veils of Language: The Marketplace of Manufactured Reality
1.PROPAGANDA OF PR
2.DISINFORMATION ORDER
3.PROPAGANDA STATE
3.PROPAGANDA MODEL
Conclusion: The Theatre of Consent: Language at the Edge of Dissolution

Introduction: Veils of Language: The Marketplace of Manufactured Reality

The Miscommunication Trilogy “The Entropy of Communication, Vol. II” Part 14 “The PR of Propaganda” examines the planned obsolescence of language and the transformation of communication into a system of psychological management where words no longer function primarily to clarify reality but increasingly operate to manufacture perception, regulate social behavior, and preserve institutional authority within technologically mediated societies. Modern civilization celebrates communication as the foundation of democracy, transparency, and public participation, yet beneath this idealized image lies a vast architecture of symbolic control where corporations, governments, media institutions, and public relations systems continuously compete to shape interpretation before independent understanding can emerge. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries witnessed not only the industrialization of production but also the industrialization of persuasion itself. Language ceased to function merely as an instrument for exchanging information and gradually evolved into a mechanism for directing emotions, organizing consensus, and neutralizing dissent through strategic repetition, symbolic framing, and narrative engineering. Public relations emerged from this transformation as one of the most influential instruments of modern power because industrial civilization increasingly depended not simply upon manufacturing products but upon manufacturing legitimacy, trust, obedience, and emotional identification among fragmented populations exposed to endless streams of mediated information. The growth of corporate capitalism, mass democracy, technological communication, and global media systems created conditions in which institutions could no longer rely solely upon force or economic dominance to maintain authority. Power required symbolic management. Public opinion itself became a strategic territory to be organized, cultivated, and manipulated through sophisticated systems of communication operating beneath the appearance of ordinary public discourse. Modern societies therefore entered an age where perception increasingly replaced direct experience, and where citizens encountered reality primarily through narratives filtered by institutions possessing enormous influence over language, imagery, and emotional association. The rise of propaganda during the world wars demonstrated with unprecedented clarity that populations could be mobilized psychologically through organized communication campaigns capable of transforming fear, patriotism, and collective identity into instruments of mass obedience. After the wars ended, these same techniques migrated seamlessly into consumer culture, political management, corporate branding, entertainment industries, and digital communication networks. Public relations became the permanent peacetime continuation of propaganda through softer and more respectable forms. The distinction between information and persuasion gradually dissolved as communication itself became commercialized, quantified, and strategically calibrated according to institutional interests. In this environment language suffers a form of planned obsolescence because words increasingly lose stable meaning and become adaptable instruments designed to maximize emotional reaction, behavioral compliance, and ideological flexibility. Concepts such as freedom, democracy, transparency, responsibility, and security are continuously redefined according to shifting political and economic objectives. Communication no longer seeks enduring truth but immediate effectiveness. Public discourse becomes saturated with euphemisms, branding strategies, emotional slogans, and manufactured narratives capable of reshaping collective memory and social perception according to the needs of power. The result is a civilization where language itself becomes unstable, disposable, and permanently subject to strategic redesign.

Architecture of Persuasion: The Psychological Colonization of Public Consciousness

The emergence of public relations transformed modern communication into a specialized science devoted to the administration of consciousness through psychological influence, symbolic coordination, and media management. Figures such as Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays recognized early that industrial societies required new systems for controlling collective perception because technological modernity had fragmented traditional social structures while simultaneously exposing populations to mass communication on an unprecedented scale. Bernays in particular understood that democratic societies could be governed more effectively through the manipulation of unconscious desires than through direct coercion alone. Drawing heavily from psychoanalysis and crowd psychology, he viewed human beings as emotionally vulnerable masses driven less by rational thought than by hidden anxieties, aspirations, and symbolic identifications. Public relations therefore ceased to involve mere publicity or information management and evolved into a mechanism for engineering consent itself. Bernays openly argued that modern societies depend upon invisible systems of influence capable of organizing public behavior beneath conscious awareness. The public relations counselor became a psychological architect responsible for constructing emotional environments in which institutions, corporations, and governments could maintain legitimacy while directing social attitudes toward desired objectives. Through staged events, symbolic associations, celebrity endorsements, orchestrated media campaigns, and strategic repetition, public relations specialists learned to transform products, ideologies, and political programs into emotionally charged social realities. Consumption became connected to identity, rebellion, liberation, patriotism, masculinity, femininity, prestige, and security. Political authority similarly became dependent upon branding strategies capable of transforming leaders into symbolic personalities carefully designed for emotional appeal. The modern citizen increasingly encountered politics not as substantive democratic participation but as spectacle shaped through narrative coordination and psychological targeting. Communication technologies accelerated this transformation dramatically. Newspapers, radio, cinema, television, advertising networks, and eventually digital platforms created continuous environments of symbolic stimulation where institutional narratives circulate permanently through everyday life. Social media intensified these processes further by converting communication into real-time behavioral monitoring systems capable of measuring emotional reactions, preferences, fears, and ideological tendencies with unprecedented precision. Public relations no longer simply broadcasts messages outward but continuously analyzes public response in order to refine persuasion dynamically. Algorithms, targeted advertising, influencer culture, and digital branding now organize social attention through invisible systems of psychological optimization designed to maximize engagement and emotional dependency. Language itself becomes fragmented into marketable signals competing for visibility within overloaded communication environments where speed replaces reflection and emotional intensity replaces rational deliberation. The planned obsolescence of language emerges here as a structural feature of digital capitalism because stable meanings obstruct perpetual adaptation and commercial flexibility. Institutions therefore benefit from maintaining ambiguity, emotional volatility, and symbolic fluidity within public discourse. Euphemistic language sanitizes violence, branding transforms ideology into lifestyle, and political slogans reduce complex realities into emotionally efficient fragments designed for mass circulation. Public consciousness becomes colonized gradually through repetition and symbolic normalization until institutional narratives appear indistinguishable from ordinary reality itself. The citizen believes himself informed while inhabiting a communication system engineered increasingly to regulate perception, limit interpretive possibilities, and transform dissent into manageable spectacle. Democratic participation survives formally while symbolic environments shape the boundaries of acceptable thought long before individuals enter public debate. Public relations therefore reflects not merely a communication profession but a historical transformation

in the nature of power itself. Authority now operates psychologically through the administration of meaning, emotion, and attention across technologically mediated populations conditioned to consume narratives as continuously as products.

The Collapse of Meaning: Propaganda, Digital Capitalism, and the Future of Language

The contemporary communication environment reveals the full consequences of transforming language into an instrument of institutional management, commercial engineering, and ideological warfare. Modern propaganda no longer appears primarily through overt censorship or totalitarian spectacle but through the saturation of public life with strategic narratives competing endlessly for emotional dominance within fragmented media systems. The rise of corporate monopolies controlling communication infrastructures intensified this condition by concentrating symbolic power within a small network of technology companies, financial institutions, entertainment conglomerates, advertising industries, and political alliances capable of shaping global information flows. Search engines, social media platforms, streaming services, news corporations, and digital advertising systems now operate as invisible governors of attention, determining which narratives gain visibility and which disappear beneath algorithmic obscurity. These systems create the illusion of limitless informational freedom while simultaneously directing perception through opaque mechanisms optimized for profit, behavioral prediction, and ideological management. The individual experiences unprecedented access to information while becoming increasingly dependent upon institutions that organize and filter reality continuously. The consequence is not greater democratic autonomy but the acceleration of communicative entropy itself. Information overload fragments collective understanding, shortens attention spans, and destabilizes the possibility of coherent public discourse. Truth becomes increasingly interchangeable with visibility, emotional intensity, or algorithmic amplification. In such conditions propaganda thrives because manipulation no longer depends upon suppressing information entirely but upon overwhelming populations with contradictory narratives, emotional distractions, and strategically fragmented realities. Public relations, advertising, political branding, entertainment media, and digital culture merge into a single system of symbolic production where every event becomes simultaneously spectacle, commodity, and ideological performance. Planned obsolescence extends beyond products and enters language itself because communication systems require constant novelty, perpetual emotional stimulation, and endlessly renewable narratives in order to sustain engagement within competitive digital economies. Words lose historical continuity and become temporary instruments adjusted according to market trends, political convenience, or media cycles. Concepts that once possessed ethical or philosophical depth are reduced to interchangeable slogans emptied of stable meaning through endless repetition and strategic misuse. Democracy becomes branding. Resistance becomes aesthetic style. Freedom becomes consumer choice. Authenticity itself becomes a marketing category. Under these conditions communication no longer functions primarily to preserve memory, transmit truth, or cultivate understanding but to maintain systems of behavioral management operating through distraction, emotional calibration, and symbolic instability. Yet the crisis of language also exposes the fragility of the systems producing it. The very technologies designed to centralize communication simultaneously generate spaces for alternative voices, independent media, whistleblowers, and critical resistance capable of exposing the hidden structures underlying modern propaganda. Grassroots movements, investigative journalism, decentralized communication networks, and critical theory continue challenging the monopolization of perception by corporate and political elites. The struggle over language therefore becomes inseparable from the struggle over democratic consciousness itself. The future of communication depends upon whether societies continue surrendering meaning to

systems of engineered persuasion or reclaim language as a medium for critical thought, historical memory, and genuine public understanding. The planned obsolescence of language represents one of the defining crises of technological civilization because societies unable to preserve stable meaning gradually lose the capacity for democratic judgment, collective memory, and moral accountability. Modern propaganda thrives precisely where communication becomes detached from truth and transformed into a mechanism for administering perception. To confront this condition requires more than media criticism alone. It requires recognizing that the battle over communication is ultimately a battle over reality itself, over who possesses the authority to define truth, construct legitimacy, and shape the symbolic foundations upon which modern civilization continues to operate.

1. PROPAGANDA OF PR

Manufacturing Consent: The Invisible Theatre of Reputation

Public relations theory and practice emerged from modern industrial society's growing need to organize public perception, manage collective emotions, and construct legitimacy through carefully controlled systems of communication, transforming persuasion into a permanent administrative function embedded within political institutions, corporations, governments, and cultural organizations. Public relations differs from ordinary publicity because it does not rely upon accidental exposure or spontaneous discussion generated externally by journalists or observers. Instead, it is internally coordinated and strategically designed to influence the interpretation of events before independent interpretation can fully emerge. Through this process communication ceases to function merely as the transmission of information and becomes an architecture of symbolic management in which language shapes emotional reactions, directs social attention, and regulates public memory. The objective is not simply visibility but favorable visibility capable of producing trust, loyalty, and compliance among audiences ranging from customers and investors to political communities and employees. The modern organization therefore no longer depends solely upon material production or economic power because its survival increasingly rests upon the ability to maintain reputational stability in a media environment defined by rapid circulation, fragmentation of attention, and perpetual competition for symbolic legitimacy. Public relations professionals became specialists in the construction of this legitimacy by designing communication campaigns, organizing interviews, preparing speeches, coordinating publicity events, and managing crises capable of threatening institutional authority. Their function extends beyond media contact because they also shape internal communication systems intended to maintain organizational cohesion and ideological unity. As a consequence, public relations gradually evolved into a discipline that manages perception itself, transforming public consciousness into a strategic field governed through narrative coordination, emotional calibration, and symbolic repetition. Even apparently neutral communication acquires persuasive dimensions because the selection of language, timing, and presentation influences how reality is interpreted by different audiences. An article praising a corporation often achieves greater persuasive force than direct advertising precisely because it appears independent from commercial intention. This distinction between paid visibility and earned legitimacy reveals the central paradox of public relations: persuasion becomes most effective when its persuasive structure remains partially concealed. The profession therefore operates through indirect influence, constructing an atmosphere of trust around institutions while presenting this atmosphere as natural, objective, and spontaneous. Such practices illustrate how communication in modern society

increasingly functions as an instrument for managing uncertainty, organizing consensus, and preserving institutional authority under conditions of permanent public scrutiny.

The intellectual foundations of public relations were established during the early twentieth century through the work of figures such as Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays, who recognized that industrial civilization required new methods for coordinating the relationship between mass institutions and fragmented populations. Ivy Lee described public relations as a managerial activity devoted to evaluating public attitudes, shaping organizational policy, and implementing programs intended to gain social understanding and acceptance. Yet even Lee admitted difficulty defining his profession because public relations occupied an unstable territory between information, persuasion, propaganda, and administration. Edward Bernays expanded these principles by emphasizing the psychological dimensions of communication and the capacity of modern media to shape collective behavior on a large scale. For Bernays, the public relations counselor functioned as an intermediary between institutions and society, managing the symbolic environment through which people formed opinions regarding products, governments, ideologies, and social movements. This conception reflected a broader transformation occurring within modern democracies where public opinion itself became an object of strategic management. Communication no longer operated solely through rational debate because emotional association, symbolic imagery, and media repetition increasingly determined social influence. Public relations organizations and professional associations later attempted to formalize ethical definitions of the field, describing it as a strategic process for building mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics. Yet the repeated effort to define public relations revealed a deeper instability within the profession itself. The concept of “publics” replaced the singular notion of “the public” because modern society consists of fragmented stakeholder groups possessing different interests, anxieties, and expectations. Customers, investors, regulators, employees, journalists, political authorities, and neighboring communities all represent distinct interpretive audiences requiring specialized communication strategies. Public relations therefore became inseparable from audience segmentation and stakeholder analysis, treating society not as a unified civic body but as a constellation of manageable perception groups. Quentin Langley emphasized that organizations depend upon multiple publics simultaneously, demonstrating that public relations extends far beyond simple marketing or customer persuasion. The profession emerged historically from earlier traditions of rhetorical influence visible in classical political theory, religious persuasion, abolitionist activism, wartime propaganda, and industrial publicity campaigns. From Aristotle’s reflections on rhetoric to twentieth-century media systems, the central objective remained the same: shaping collective interpretation through symbolic control. During the postwar period American corporations exported public relations practices internationally, integrating them into global political and economic structures. The rise of digital communication later intensified these processes by accelerating the circulation of information and enabling institutions to monitor public response with unprecedented precision. Social media platforms transformed reputation management into a continuous real-time activity where organizations communicate directly with audiences while simultaneously tracking engagement, reactions, impressions, and behavioral patterns. Public relations thus evolved into a system of perpetual symbolic maintenance in which institutions constantly adjust narratives to preserve legitimacy within unstable communication environments.

The operational techniques of public relations reveal how modern communication increasingly depends upon strategic narrative construction rather than transparent information exchange. Public relations professionals shape institutional perception by organizing publicity campaigns, preparing

media kits, coordinating interviews, producing newsletters, and maintaining relationships with journalists and opinion leaders capable of amplifying preferred narratives. Communication becomes tactical because every statement, image, and event is evaluated according to its potential influence upon audience interpretation. Specialized branches of the profession emerged to address different dimensions of institutional power, including financial communication, crisis management, government relations, lifestyle branding, executive visibility, and digital community engagement. Audience targeting became essential because effective persuasion requires adapting symbolic messages to the desires, fears, and expectations of particular stakeholder groups. Public relations practitioners therefore analyze demographic and psychological characteristics in order to construct coherent narratives capable of maintaining consistency across multiple communication channels. Messaging functions as a mechanism for preserving interpretive unity by ensuring that organizations repeat compatible themes through speeches, interviews, social media content, and promotional campaigns. Through repetition, audiences gradually internalize institutional language until corporate or political narratives begin to appear indistinguishable from ordinary reality itself. Social media intensified this condition by dissolving traditional boundaries between publicity, journalism, entertainment, and personal interaction. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Twitter transformed communication into a permanent performance of visibility where organizations continuously compete for attention within fragmented digital environments. Metrics measuring engagement, impressions, reach, and mentions converted public perception into quantifiable data subject to strategic manipulation. Crisis management became especially important within this system because reputational damage can spread globally within moments. Public relations therefore developed elaborate crisis communication plans designed to preserve institutional legitimacy during scandals, disasters, or political controversies. Historical examples such as the Tylenol cyanide crisis or the Deepwater Horizon oil spill demonstrate how organizations attempt to restore trust through controlled transparency, media coordination, and symbolic displays of responsibility. Yet these practices also reveal the tension between ethical communication and reputational self-preservation. Professional associations established ethical codes emphasizing honesty, expertise, fairness, independence, and social responsibility, while evaluative models such as the T.A.R.E.S. test sought to measure truthfulness and ethical persuasion. Nevertheless, the profession remains haunted by accusations of manipulation because persuasion often operates through selective presentation, strategic ambiguity, euphemistic language, and emotional framing. The concept of spin illustrates this ambiguity particularly clearly. Originally associated with overt deception, spin evolved into the practice of polishing reality through selective emphasis while avoiding direct falsehood. Critics argue that such techniques erode democratic discourse by replacing genuine deliberation with perception management, while defenders insist that strategic communication is unavoidable within mass society. Negative public relations further exposes the darker dimensions of symbolic competition through campaigns designed to damage reputations, spread damaging narratives, or manufacture artificial grassroots support through astroturfing and front organizations. Political lobbying, reputation laundering, and media orchestration demonstrate how public relations can become intertwined with systems of ideological control that conceal institutional interests beneath the appearance of spontaneous public consensus. Modern communication therefore exists within a paradoxical condition where democratic societies celebrate transparency and free expression while simultaneously depending upon sophisticated mechanisms for engineering perception. Public relations embodies this contradiction because it promises mutual understanding while operating through strategic influence, symbolic management, and controlled visibility. In this sense the profession reflects the broader transformation of language within technological civilization, where

communication increasingly functions not as the discovery of truth but as the administration of belief.

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Architects of Consent: The Machinery of Invisible Influence

In *Propaganda* and numerous writings on public opinion, Edward Bernays transformed modern persuasion into a systematic discipline grounded in psychology, mass communication, and symbolic management, arguing that democratic societies could not function without organized methods for directing collective perception and shaping social behavior. Born in Vienna into the extended family of Sigmund Freud, Bernays entered the modern world at the intersection of psychoanalysis, journalism, and industrial mass culture, conditions that would profoundly shape his understanding of communication as an instrument of psychological influence. After emigrating to the United States with his family during childhood, he studied agriculture at Cornell University, yet abandoned that field almost immediately in favor of journalism and publicity work, recognizing early that the twentieth century would increasingly belong not merely to producers of material goods but to managers of public consciousness. His early experiences as a press agent and theatrical promoter revealed that public attention could be strategically manufactured through association, symbolism, and emotional suggestion rather than through direct argument alone. By linking charitable causes, entertainment events, and carefully designed narratives, Bernays discovered that audiences often respond less to factual information than to emotionally charged symbolic structures capable of transforming ordinary events into social spectacles. These experiences became the foundation of his later philosophy of public relations, where persuasion functioned not simply through logic but through the orchestration of desires, anxieties, aspirations, and collective fantasies hidden beneath conscious awareness. The First World War accelerated this transformation dramatically. During his service with the Committee on Public Information, Bernays witnessed how governments could mobilize entire populations through organized propaganda campaigns designed to generate patriotic unity and emotional obedience. The war demonstrated that public opinion was neither stable nor naturally rational but highly susceptible to coordinated symbolic management. Bernays later concluded that if propaganda techniques could successfully persuade populations to support war, similar methods could also be applied during peacetime to shape consumer behavior, political attitudes, and social norms. This realization became central to the emergence of modern public relations as a permanent institutional function within democratic societies. Communication ceased to operate as neutral transmission and instead became a mechanism for engineering collective interpretation itself. Bernays understood that industrial civilization required not only economic production but also the continuous manufacture of social consent capable of stabilizing mass society under conditions of rapid technological and cultural change.

Bernays developed his theories by combining psychoanalytic insights with crowd psychology, believing that human beings are governed less by rational thought than by unconscious desires and emotional impulses that can be strategically manipulated through symbols and media narratives.

Drawing inspiration from Freud's analysis of hidden drives and irrational behavior, Bernays approached the public not as autonomous individuals engaged in critical reasoning but as psychologically vulnerable masses responsive to suggestion, imagery, repetition, and emotional association. This perspective fundamentally altered the practice of persuasion because it shifted attention away from factual debate toward subconscious influence. His famous promotional campaigns illustrate this transformation clearly. In promoting bacon and eggs as the standard American breakfast, Bernays did not merely advertise food products directly. Instead, he secured endorsements from thousands of physicians who framed the meal as scientifically beneficial, thereby converting commercial promotion into apparent medical consensus. Authority itself became a persuasive technology because audiences were more likely to accept messages appearing independent from commercial interests. Similarly, his "Torches of Freedom" campaign reframed female smoking as a symbol of liberation and equality, transforming cigarettes into political and psychological emblems associated with modern womanhood. Bernays recognized that products achieve cultural power when attached to emotional meanings transcending their material function. Smoking no longer represented tobacco consumption alone but participation in a broader narrative of emancipation, rebellion, and social transformation. Through such methods Bernays pioneered the use of third-party endorsements, media staging, symbolic rituals, and manufactured events designed to conceal the strategic origins of persuasion. He referred to these techniques as "the engineering of consent," a phrase revealing his conviction that public opinion could be scientifically organized through the management of psychological forces. For Bernays democracy required invisible systems of coordination because modern populations were too large and fragmented to govern themselves through spontaneous rational consensus. Those who understood the mechanisms shaping collective thought therefore possessed enormous social power. In *Propaganda*, published in 1928, Bernays openly argued that unseen groups manipulate habits, opinions, and perceptions in every sphere of modern life. Rather than viewing this hidden influence as dangerous, he considered it necessary for maintaining social order within technologically advanced mass societies. Yet this philosophy introduced profound ethical tensions into democratic communication. If consent can be engineered through subconscious manipulation, then the distinction between democratic participation and psychological control becomes increasingly unstable. Public relations under Bernays ceased to involve mere publicity and instead evolved into a system for administering social reality itself through symbolic influence disguised as ordinary public discourse.

The political implications of Bernays' methods became especially visible through his involvement with powerful corporations and state interests, demonstrating how public relations could shape not only consumer habits but international political events and ideological conflicts. His work for the United Fruit Company revealed the geopolitical dimensions of perception management. During the mid-twentieth century Bernays helped construct favorable public narratives surrounding the corporation's operations in Central America, particularly Guatemala, portraying the region as economically progressive while simultaneously contributing to fears that political developments there represented Communist expansion threatening American interests. Through media influence, strategic messaging, and carefully coordinated publicity efforts, Guatemala was transformed within the American imagination from a distant nation into a symbolic battleground within Cold War ideology. This manufactured perception helped legitimize United States intervention and contributed to the eventual overthrow of the democratically elected Guatemalan government in 1954. The episode exposed how public relations could function not simply as commercial promotion but as a mechanism capable of influencing foreign policy, public fear, and geopolitical intervention. Bernays' methods demonstrated that symbolic narratives possess material

consequences because societies increasingly act according to mediated perceptions rather than direct experience. The ethical controversy surrounding his career therefore extends far beyond advertising techniques or media strategy. Bernays revealed that modern communication systems allow concentrated power to organize collective interpretation on a massive scale while maintaining the illusion of spontaneous public opinion. His defenders argued that such influence could serve constructive social purposes by promoting public health campaigns, civic cooperation, and institutional stability. Critics, however, warned that the manipulation of unconscious desires threatens democratic autonomy by replacing informed deliberation with emotional conditioning and manufactured consensus. The rise of modern public relations blurred the boundaries separating persuasion, propaganda, marketing, and psychological control until communication itself became inseparable from systems of power. Bernays' legacy remains deeply paradoxical because he simultaneously professionalized public relations and exposed the fragility of democratic independence within media-driven societies. His theories anticipated a civilization increasingly governed through symbolic management where political authority, consumer culture, corporate legitimacy, and social identity are shaped by invisible networks of influence operating beneath the surface of public awareness. Modern digital media, algorithmic advertising, influencer culture, and strategic political messaging continue to reflect principles Bernays articulated decades earlier. Contemporary societies remain immersed in systems where perception is continuously engineered through emotional targeting, behavioral analysis, and narrative coordination. Bernays therefore stands not merely as a historical figure but as a symbol of modernity's transformation of communication into an instrument of psychological administration. His career reveals how language, imagery, and media can organize reality itself, producing forms of obedience and identification that appear voluntary while emerging from carefully structured mechanisms of symbolic control. The ethical dilemma at the center of his work remains unresolved because modern democracies continue to depend simultaneously upon public participation and sophisticated techniques for managing the very consciousness through which participation becomes possible.

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The Engineering of Belief: The Invisible Government of Persuasion

In "Manipulating Public Opinion: The Why and the How," Edward L. Bernays presents public opinion not as a stable expression of rational democratic consciousness but as a fluid and malleable social force shaped through psychological influence, symbolic leadership, and organized communication, arguing that modern civilization depends upon the deliberate management of collective attitudes by those capable of understanding the emotional structure of mass behavior. Bernays approached public opinion simultaneously as a political reality and as a psychological mechanism, insisting that societies are governed not merely through laws or institutions but through the capacity to direct public interpretation toward desired conclusions. In its narrow form, public opinion represents the temporary attitudes of a particular group toward a given issue, yet in its broader sense it signifies the power of organized groups to shape the perceptions of society as a whole. This broader understanding transformed persuasion into a strategic science because it implied that social consensus does not arise naturally but is actively manufactured through

influence, repetition, symbolism, and emotional association. Bernays believed that civilizations are constrained by inertia, meaning that societies instinctively cling to familiar customs, inherited beliefs, and established moral structures even when historical conditions demand transformation. New ideas therefore encounter resistance not because they lack truth but because collective consciousness fears disruption and uncertainty. The innovator, reformer, political leader, or industrial promoter must consequently overcome this resistance by appealing not only to reason but to deeper psychological impulses embedded within human behavior. Public persuasion becomes necessary because democratic societies contain fragmented populations incapable of spontaneous agreement. In this environment communication evolves into an instrument for organizing social direction by presenting new ideas in forms emotionally acceptable to the public imagination. Bernays distinguished propaganda from education while simultaneously acknowledging their structural similarities. Education attempts to inform, whereas propaganda openly advances partisan objectives, yet both seek to alter perception and guide interpretation. For Bernays this process was not inherently corrupt because every society depends upon symbolic mechanisms that coordinate collective behavior and create temporary unity among competing interests. Public opinion therefore functions less as an independent moral force than as a battlefield of narratives in which organized groups compete to define reality itself. Democracy, in this interpretation, becomes inseparable from persuasion because political legitimacy increasingly depends upon the ability to manufacture emotional identification between institutions and populations. The management of perception emerges not as an accidental feature of modernity but as one of its central organizing principles.

Bernays argued that the motives behind the manipulation of public opinion are varied and extend across political, economic, philanthropic, educational, social, and personal domains, revealing how persuasion permeates every sphere of modern civilization. Governments attempt to mobilize support for policies, corporations seek acceptance for products and industries, reformers strive to transform social attitudes, and ambitious individuals pursue recognition and influence through strategic communication. Public opinion therefore becomes a contested symbolic territory where competing interests struggle to impose preferred interpretations upon society. Bernays did not deny the dangers contained within this process. He openly acknowledged that manipulation could be abused for selfish or destructive purposes, yet he maintained that an educated public possesses the capacity to protect itself by learning how persuasion functions and by understanding how to articulate its own desires effectively. This argument reveals a profound contradiction within democratic modernity. On one hand Bernays insisted that mass societies require organized guidance because ordinary populations are psychologically vulnerable, emotionally reactive, and often unable to process complex political or social realities independently. On the other hand he claimed that education and awareness could shield the public from exploitation. The tension between these positions exposes the unstable relationship between democracy and psychological influence. Bernays increasingly relied upon introspective psychology rather than experimental laboratory methods because he believed that the true mechanisms of persuasion lie within unconscious desires, collective anxieties, emotional associations, and social aspirations. Public relations specialists therefore study not merely rational arguments but group identities, symbolic loyalties, social cleavages, and the relationship between leaders and followers. Effective persuasion depends upon understanding how people interpret events emotionally before they evaluate them intellectually. Communication channels such as newspapers, speeches, radio broadcasts, advertisements, and public events become instruments through which emotional meanings are transmitted and normalized. Bernays emphasized that messages must be adapted to the form of communication being used because persuasion operates differently through spoken

performance, printed narrative, visual imagery, or dramatic spectacle. This insight transformed communication into a highly technical process governed by strategic adaptation rather than spontaneous expression. The examples Bernays presented illustrate how carefully orchestrated symbolic events can redirect public attitudes. The campaign organized by the National Association for the Improvement of the Colored People to hold a convention in Atlanta demonstrated how social perception could be altered through the strategic use of symbolism, location, leadership, and public visibility. By bringing influential Northern and Southern figures together in a region associated with racial division, the organizers transformed the convention itself into a symbolic performance of reconciliation and legitimacy. Public opinion shifted not solely because of arguments presented but because the event created a new emotional and visual narrative through which race relations could be interpreted differently. Similarly, the revival of the millinery industry through a fashion spectacle involving artists, celebrities, and elegant social imagery demonstrated how consumer behavior could be manipulated through orchestrated desire rather than direct commercial instruction. Bernays understood that dramatic events possess extraordinary persuasive power because they transform abstract messages into emotionally memorable experiences capable of reshaping habits and perceptions unconsciously.

The broader implications of Bernays' theories reveal the emergence of modern society as a civilization governed increasingly through symbolic management, where communication functions as an invisible mechanism for directing social behavior beneath the appearance of free democratic choice. Political leaders, corporations, industries, and nations all learned to employ strategic persuasion in order to shape public identity, normalize economic practices, and construct legitimacy. Bernays described how President Coolidge's public image was softened through carefully staged interactions with actors and entertainers, converting a distant political figure into a relatable human personality through theatrical performance. Similarly, Lithuania improved its international recognition by presenting cultural and economic narratives strategically to the American public, while American silk manufacturers used French artistic authority to legitimize domestic products within global markets. Even food industries employed psychological persuasion by associating products with scientific expertise and respected institutions in order to overcome public suspicion. Margarine, initially viewed negatively, achieved broader acceptance only after campaigns reframed it through medical endorsements and educational narratives emphasizing purity and modern efficiency. These examples demonstrate that modern public opinion is not formed spontaneously through direct experience but through mediated symbolic structures carefully designed to guide interpretation. Bernays recognized that industrial civilization depends upon mass production and mass distribution, conditions requiring equally sophisticated systems for coordinating public desire and maintaining social stability. Communication therefore becomes inseparable from administration because populations must be persuaded continuously to consume products, support institutions, and accept changing social realities. The rise of public relations reflects the transformation of language itself into a managerial technology capable of engineering emotional reactions, regulating attention, and organizing collective consciousness. Yet Bernays also insisted that persuasion must ultimately align with what he called the public's "will to live, progress, and benefit socially and individually." This claim attempted to justify manipulation by presenting it as potentially constructive and socially beneficial. Nevertheless, the ethical problem remains unresolved because the distinction between guidance and control becomes increasingly difficult to define once psychological influence operates beneath conscious awareness. Bernays' work reveals that modern democracies function through systems of invisible governance in which symbolic authority shapes behavior more effectively than coercion. Public opinion appears autonomous while simultaneously emerging from carefully coordinated networks of media

influence, emotional engineering, and strategic communication. The techniques Bernays described anticipated contemporary systems of advertising, political branding, algorithmic targeting, social media influence, and behavioral analytics that dominate modern communication landscapes. His theories exposed a civilization where power increasingly operates through the administration of perception itself, transforming public consciousness into an object of technical management. The modern citizen therefore inhabits a world saturated with organized persuasion where beliefs, preferences, fears, and desires are continuously shaped by institutions competing for symbolic control. Bernays did not invent this condition, but he articulated its mechanisms with extraordinary clarity, revealing how modern society governs itself through the invisible architecture of engineered consent.

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The Machinery of Consent: Democracy Beneath the Spell of Communication

In “The Engineering of Consent,” Edward L. Bernays argues that modern democracy inevitably expanded the meaning of freedom of speech into a broader right to persuade, transforming communication into one of the central mechanisms through which societies organize political behavior, shape collective attitudes, and direct social action. Bernays viewed the emergence of mass communication systems not merely as technological progress but as a radical transformation in the structure of power itself. The expansion of newspapers, magazines, radio stations, public forums, classrooms, advertising networks, and motion picture theaters created a civilization saturated with messages continuously competing for influence over public consciousness. The United States, in his description, became a symbolic chamber in which every spoken phrase could be amplified through communication machinery until it reached millions of minds simultaneously. This immense network of transmission altered the relationship between leaders and populations because authority no longer depended primarily upon physical proximity, direct personal charisma, or localized influence. In earlier societies leaders governed within geographically limited communities where relationships remained immediate and personal. Industrial modernity dissolved those conditions by creating mass populations separated from centers of political and economic power. Communication therefore emerged as the invisible bridge connecting institutions to the public imagination. Bernays recognized that whoever mastered this communication apparatus acquired the capacity to shape perception on a national scale. The significance of modern media lay not only in its reach but in its ability to repeat, coordinate, and normalize particular narratives until they became embedded within ordinary social consciousness. Words, images, speeches, headlines, slogans, and symbolic events collectively formed a psychological environment through which reality itself was interpreted. Bernays described two interlocking levels of communication operating within democratic society. The first consisted of commercial and public media systems including newspapers, magazines, radio, books, billboards, theaters, pamphlets, and public assemblies. The second level emerged through specialized communication structures operated by organized groups, associations, political factions, industries, unions, and ideological organizations that maintained their own channels for distributing influence through meetings, lectures, newsletters, and institutional networks. These overlapping systems formed what Bernays understood as a vast web of persuasion surrounding every individual citizen. Public

consciousness therefore existed within a permanent atmosphere of symbolic pressure where countless organized interests struggled to direct interpretation and shape behavior. Bernays insisted that this communication machinery could serve either constructive or destructive purposes depending upon who controlled it and for what objectives it was employed. Modern democracy, in his view, could not function without organized persuasion because mass societies required coordination across enormous populations unable to maintain direct participation in every political or economic decision. The management of opinion thus became inseparable from the maintenance of social order itself.

Bernays introduced the concept of “the engineering of consent” to describe the scientific and strategic process through which leaders, institutions, and specialists shape public opinion by applying psychological knowledge, communication techniques, and organized media influence to social and political objectives. This phrase revealed his conviction that consent is not naturally spontaneous but must be carefully produced through the deliberate administration of symbols, narratives, and emotional appeals. Leaders representing governments, industries, labor organizations, social movements, and political factions all depend upon public support in order to maintain authority. Yet public support cannot be assumed because modern populations are fragmented, distracted, and exposed to competing influences. Bernays therefore believed that specialists trained in communication and public relations were necessary to bridge the gap between institutional objectives and public acceptance. These specialists analyze the relationship between organizations and society, advising leaders on how to adjust policies, messages, and public appearances in order to generate favorable responses. The process begins with extensive research into public attitudes, assumptions, desires, fears, and behavioral tendencies. Bernays emphasized that effective persuasion requires understanding not only what people consciously believe but also the deeper emotional and subconscious motives shaping collective behavior. Research functions as a roadmap because it identifies the symbolic language most likely to resonate with different audiences and reveals the social tensions capable of influencing opinion. Once public psychology has been analyzed, communication campaigns are constructed around themes appealing to both conscious reasoning and hidden emotional impulses. Bernays believed that appeals directed toward unconscious desires often possess greater persuasive force than purely rational arguments because human beings respond to symbolic meanings tied to identity, status, security, and aspiration. The engineering of consent therefore operates through emotional orchestration rather than factual instruction alone. Public relations campaigns must coordinate every element of communication carefully, synchronizing speeches, news events, advertising materials, endorsements, public appearances, and media timing to maximize persuasive impact. Bernays insisted that modern persuasion depends heavily upon the creation of dramatic events capable of generating publicity and emotional engagement. Newsworthy spectacles capture public attention more effectively than abstract arguments because they transform symbolic ideas into visible social realities. Once initiated, such events stimulate further discussion, reactions, and secondary activities among group leaders and institutions, reinforcing the original message through repetition across communication channels. Bernays viewed this process as indispensable to democratic governance because societies require methods for directing public energy toward socially constructive goals. Yet embedded within this philosophy is a profound paradox. The engineering of consent assumes that democratic populations must be guided by invisible systems of psychological influence operating beneath the surface of ordinary public awareness. Consent appears voluntary while emerging from carefully structured symbolic environments designed by specialists skilled in persuasion. Democracy consequently becomes dependent upon mechanisms that simultaneously preserve and manipulate the appearance of public autonomy.

The historical development of modern propaganda and public relations confirmed for Bernays the extraordinary power of organized persuasion in shaping collective behavior during moments of national crisis and social transformation. During the First World War the Committee on Public Information demonstrated how words, slogans, patriotic imagery, speeches, posters, and coordinated media campaigns could mobilize populations for war on an unprecedented scale. The Second World War intensified these methods further through large-scale information campaigns organized by institutions such as the Office of War Information, proving that modern states increasingly depend upon communication warfare as much as military force. Bernays interpreted these developments as evidence that persuasion had become one of the defining instruments of twentieth-century power. The expansion of mass literacy, technological media, and national communication networks created conditions in which influence could operate indirectly across enormous populations without requiring personal interaction between leaders and followers. Public relations emerged as a profession precisely because modern institutions recognized the necessity of shaping perception systematically. Specialists in persuasion became architects of public consciousness responsible for coordinating the relationship between organizations and society. Bernays argued that the engineering of consent extends into nearly every aspect of modern life because communication influences political choices, economic behavior, cultural values, social movements, and even private habits. Modern citizens therefore inhabit an environment where perception is continuously managed through organized symbolic systems competing to define reality. The ethical implications of this condition remain deeply ambiguous. Bernays acknowledged that propaganda techniques could be abused by demagogues and authoritarian movements for antidemocratic purposes, yet he maintained that responsible leadership could employ the same methods constructively in support of social progress. This distinction between constructive and destructive persuasion rests upon the intentions of those exercising influence rather than upon the techniques themselves. The danger lies in the fact that the same communication machinery capable of promoting public health, educational reform, or civic unity can also manufacture fear, conformity, prejudice, and ideological obedience. Bernays' theory ultimately reveals that modern democracy functions through invisible systems of symbolic coordination in which public opinion is not discovered but produced. Communication ceases to be a neutral exchange of information and becomes a mechanism for organizing collective consciousness through repetition, emotional framing, strategic timing, and mediated spectacle. The modern citizen encounters reality increasingly through narratives filtered by institutional communicators skilled in psychological influence. Bernays exposed a civilization governed through the administration of perception where leadership depends upon the ability to engineer belief, normalize desired interpretations, and transform ideas into social action through carefully managed communication environments. His concept of consent engineering anticipated contemporary systems of political branding, algorithmic media targeting, digital propaganda, and corporate narrative management that dominate modern technological societies. The invisible government of communication continues to shape democratic life by directing public attention, regulating emotional reactions, and constructing symbolic realities within which citizens believe themselves to be acting freely. Bernays therefore revealed one of the central contradictions of modernity: societies dedicated to freedom increasingly rely upon sophisticated methods for managing the consciousness through which freedom itself is experienced.

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Shaping the Crowd: The Symbolic Anatomy of Influence

In “Molding Public Opinion,” Edward L. Bernays presents public opinion as one of the defining forces of modern civilization, arguing that industrial democracy depends increasingly upon the ability to understand, organize, and strategically influence collective attitudes through communication, symbolism, and psychological insight. The experiences of wartime propaganda revealed to Bernays that public consciousness could be directed toward specific objectives with extraordinary effectiveness when communication systems were coordinated scientifically. The First World War demonstrated that populations could be mobilized emotionally through carefully constructed narratives, patriotic symbols, and repetitive messaging distributed through newspapers, speeches, posters, films, and public campaigns. The success of these methods transformed public opinion into a measurable and manageable social phenomenon rather than an unpredictable expression of spontaneous civic thought. Bernays recognized that modern civilization had entered an era where no institution, industry, government, or movement could survive without securing public approval in a crowded environment dominated by competing voices struggling for visibility and legitimacy. The acceleration of communication technologies intensified this condition by shrinking geographical distance and allowing ideas to circulate with unprecedented speed across entire populations. Public attention itself became a contested resource. Every organization seeking survival or expansion therefore required specialized methods for interpreting itself to the public while simultaneously interpreting public attitudes back to institutional leadership. From this necessity emerged the modern public relations counselor, a figure positioned between institutions and society whose task involves managing the symbolic relationship between power and perception. Bernays viewed this role not merely as publicity management but as a broader system of social mediation intended to create harmony between conflicting interests and stabilize democratic society through strategic persuasion. Yet embedded within this vision lies the recognition that propaganda possesses immense power regardless of whether it serves constructive or destructive purposes. Public persuasion is not neutral because it shapes how reality itself is perceived and emotionally experienced. Bernays insisted that forces working toward social progress must employ propaganda techniques just as effectively as destructive movements because modern public life is governed increasingly through organized influence rather than direct experience. Communication ceases to be a passive transmission of facts and instead becomes a mechanism for directing interpretation, organizing collective desires, and constructing symbolic legitimacy. Public opinion, in this framework, functions less as an independent democratic force than as a field continuously molded through psychological and media strategies designed to channel attention toward preferred outcomes.

Bernays rejected the simplistic assumption that “the public” exists as a single unified entity possessing one coherent consciousness. Instead, he argued that society consists of countless smaller groups connected by shared interests, identities, fears, values, occupations, and loyalties. Political strategists, industries, social movements, and governments all confront fragmented publics divided by geography, age, gender, economic class, religion, education, ideology, and cultural affiliation. The challenge of the propagandist lies in identifying these groups and understanding how to influence them effectively. Bernays believed that mass persuasion does not operate by converting entire populations directly but by strategically targeting influential intermediaries capable of transmitting ideas throughout their respective communities. Group leaders therefore occupy a central position within the structure of public opinion. Individuals tend

to follow trusted authorities within their social environments because modern society overwhelms citizens with complexity and information beyond the capacity of any individual to evaluate independently. Leaders simplify reality by interpreting events for their followers, making them essential conduits between organized persuasion and collective behavior. Bernays pointed to campaigns such as the repeal of prohibition to demonstrate how social transformation often depends less upon persuading millions individually than upon gaining the support of key figures whose approval legitimizes new ideas within broader communities. Public opinion thus spreads through hierarchical networks of symbolic influence where authority, trust, and imitation shape collective attitudes more effectively than direct rational argument. Equally important to Bernays was the understanding of human motivation. Beneath political beliefs and social identities operate fundamental psychological drives including self-preservation, ambition, patriotism, affection, fear, desire for status, and the need to belong. These emotional forces form the hidden structure upon which public opinion rests. Successful persuasion requires aligning messages with these underlying motives rather than relying solely upon factual explanation. The milk industry, for example, strengthened public support for milk consumption by associating it with health, vitality, and protection of the body, thereby connecting an ordinary product to the deep instinct of self-preservation. Bernays recognized that human beings respond more intensely to symbolic meanings attached to emotional needs than to abstract information. Symbols therefore became one of the most powerful instruments within public relations. A symbol acts as a shortcut to emotional understanding because it condenses complex ideas into familiar images, phrases, personalities, or narratives capable of triggering immediate reactions. Bernays observed how words themselves can acquire symbolic force when associated repeatedly with emotional judgments. The connection established between the word “racketeer” and the issue of prohibition transformed public interpretation of prohibition by attaching criminality and corruption symbolically to its defenders. Through repetition and strategic framing, symbols bypass extended analysis and shape instinctive emotional responses. Modern propaganda depends upon the careful selection and circulation of such symbols because societies increasingly interpret reality through mediated representations rather than direct experience. Public consciousness becomes structured around emotionally charged signs capable of guiding behavior quickly and efficiently within mass communication environments.

The media systems through which symbols circulate complete the architecture of modern public persuasion, transforming communication into one of the central instruments of democratic power. Bernays emphasized that newspapers, radio broadcasts, films, public demonstrations, billboards, speeches, and later television each possess unique persuasive capacities depending upon the circumstances and objectives of a campaign. No single medium guarantees influence universally because communication effectiveness depends upon selecting forms capable of matching the emotional and psychological conditions of the target audience. A public spectacle may produce stronger emotional identification than a written article, while a repeated radio broadcast may normalize ideas gradually through familiarity and repetition. Modern societies possess immense communication infrastructures allowing individuals, corporations, governments, and organized groups to reach vast audiences almost instantly. Bernays viewed the United States as especially vulnerable to persuasion because of its enormous interconnected media system where messages circulate continuously across social and geographical boundaries. Yet he also believed democracy protects itself partially through the existence of counter-propaganda. Competing groups possess the freedom to challenge one another’s narratives, preventing any single organization from monopolizing public consciousness entirely. Democratic debate therefore becomes a struggle between rival systems of persuasion competing for symbolic dominance within the public sphere.

Bernays outlined four essential stages for constructing an effective public relations campaign. First, objectives must be defined clearly and aligned with public interests because persuasion becomes unstable when disconnected from social desires or concerns. Second, extensive analysis of public attitudes is required in order to understand existing perceptions, prejudices, anxieties, and expectations surrounding the issue. Third, the results of this analysis must shape an organized action plan integrating public relations into the broader institutional structure rather than treating communication as superficial decoration. Finally, communication media must be selected strategically and employed with continuity, precision, and careful timing to ensure the campaign achieves emotional and symbolic coherence. Bernays understood that persuasion succeeds through cumulative reinforcement across multiple channels rather than isolated messages delivered randomly. Public opinion emerges gradually from the repetition of coordinated narratives embedded within daily social experience. His theory therefore reveals the transformation of modern democracy into a communication society where perception itself becomes administratively organized through psychological expertise, symbolic manipulation, and strategic media coordination. The citizen increasingly encounters reality through narratives engineered by institutions skilled in molding emotional interpretation. Public relations evolves into a mechanism for managing social behavior indirectly by constructing symbolic environments within which individuals believe they are acting freely while their perceptions have already been shaped by organized influence. Bernays exposed the hidden structure of modern power: not domination through overt coercion alone, but through the continuous molding of consciousness itself by those who understand how to transform communication into an instrument of collective guidance. The modern democratic world consequently rests upon an invisible architecture of persuasion where symbols, motivations, leaders, and media combine to shape the emotional and ideological foundations of public life.

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Invisible Governors: The Psychological Architecture of Mass Obedience

In *Propaganda*, published in 1928, Edward L. Bernays describes modern democracy as a society governed not primarily through visible institutions or direct coercion but through the organized manipulation of public habits, opinions, desires, and symbolic perceptions by an invisible network of influential individuals who understand the mechanisms of collective psychology. Bernays argues that democratic civilization depends upon this hidden structure because modern social life has become too vast, complex, and interconnected to function through purely individual decision-making. Human beings imagine themselves autonomous, rational, and independent in their political and social judgments, yet according to Bernays their preferences, tastes, moral assumptions, and public attitudes are constantly shaped by unseen forces operating through communication systems, leadership structures, and organized propaganda. The “invisible government” is not necessarily a formal conspiracy but a social mechanism emerging naturally from the organization of modern mass society. Political leaders, industrialists, editors, advertisers, intellectuals, religious authorities, and media specialists collectively guide the direction of public thought by selecting which issues deserve attention, which ideas appear legitimate, and which symbols acquire emotional authority. Bernays insists that society itself requires such mechanisms because without organized leadership the overwhelming complexity of modern life would produce

paralysis and chaos. In theory every citizen possesses the freedom to make independent political choices and evaluate every public issue rationally. In practice such independence becomes impossible because no ordinary individual can fully analyze the enormous economic, political, moral, and scientific information surrounding modern existence. People therefore surrender parts of their decision-making power voluntarily to leaders, experts, and institutions capable of simplifying reality into manageable narratives. Political parties emerged precisely because democratic populations discovered that unrestricted individual voting without organizational structures created confusion rather than effective governance. Invisible systems of coordination narrowed countless possibilities into simplified choices acceptable for mass participation. Bernays viewed this process not as an accidental corruption of democracy but as its operational foundation. Public opinion must be organized because modern civilization depends upon collective coordination across immense populations unable to maintain direct personal relationships with centers of power. Newspapers, radio broadcasts, magazines, books, speeches, advertisements, and emerging technologies of communication therefore became instruments through which the invisible governors regulate social consciousness. The citizen encounters reality increasingly through mediated interpretations rather than direct experience, allowing organized persuasion to shape political loyalty, consumer behavior, ethical standards, and cultural identity simultaneously. Bernays recognized that modern propaganda does not merely impose ideas externally but organizes the very framework through which people interpret the world around them.

The growth of industrial civilization intensified the necessity for organized propaganda because technological communication systems expanded the speed and scale at which ideas could circulate across societies. Bernays observed that railroads, telephones, telegraphs, printing presses, airplanes, and radio transformed the structure of human communication by allowing information to spread rapidly through geographically dispersed populations. Modern society became fragmented into countless specialized social groups divided by political ideology, race, religion, economics, profession, education, and cultural identity. Each of these groups generated its own associations, publications, leaders, and symbolic authorities capable of influencing public attitudes internally while competing with other organized interests externally. Democracy therefore evolved into a system where public consciousness is shaped through overlapping networks of influence rather than direct civic deliberation among equal individuals. Bernays argued that this complexity makes organized persuasion unavoidable because modern populations require interpretive guidance in order to navigate the immense volume of competing information surrounding them daily. Specialized organizations and communication channels help simplify public thought by selecting which narratives deserve attention and by transforming complex social realities into emotionally understandable symbols. Bernays openly acknowledged that many critics condemn propaganda because of its manipulation of news, exaggeration of personalities, and creation of public spectacle surrounding politicians, products, and social movements. Yet he maintained that these methods remain necessary for organizing democratic competition within technologically advanced societies. Without propaganda, the public sphere would dissolve into informational disorder incapable of sustaining coherent collective action. The invisible government therefore operates not through brute force but through symbolic management. Those who understand the mental habits and emotional patterns of the masses gain extraordinary power because they can direct collective attention toward desired objectives while suppressing competing interpretations. Bernays' description of propaganda reveals a civilization governed increasingly through perception rather than direct authority. Modern leadership depends upon the capacity to coordinate symbols, communication systems, and emotional associations in ways that produce obedience without overt coercion. Public opinion appears spontaneous while emerging from carefully

structured informational environments shaped by institutions competing for symbolic control. Bernays' argument ultimately exposes a profound paradox within democratic modernity: societies committed to freedom increasingly depend upon sophisticated techniques for managing the consciousness through which freedom is experienced. The citizen believes himself independent precisely because the mechanisms guiding his preferences remain largely invisible. Public consent becomes a manufactured product emerging from organized influence rather than purely rational public deliberation. Bernays did not regard this process as entirely sinister because he believed organized persuasion could serve constructive social purposes when directed responsibly. Nevertheless, his analysis reveals how fragile democratic autonomy becomes once communication systems are capable of shaping collective perception continuously beneath conscious awareness.

The psychological foundations of propaganda form the second major dimension of Bernays' theory, where the discoveries of mass psychology transformed propaganda from crude repetition into a more refined science of emotional and symbolic manipulation. Influenced by thinkers such as Gustave Le Bon and Wilfred Trotter, Bernays argued that group psychology differs fundamentally from individual psychology because crowds operate through impulses, emotions, habits, and unconscious associations rather than through rational critical analysis. Once individuals become part of collective social groups, they respond instinctively to authority, symbols, clichés, emotional contagion, and shared desires. Propaganda therefore succeeds not by appealing solely to logic but by activating unconscious motivations hidden beneath conscious thought. Bernays compared the modern propagandist to a scientist studying human behavior systematically in order to predict and influence collective reactions. Public relations specialists analyze social trends, emotional anxieties, class aspirations, gender expectations, and patterns of imitation in order to determine how specific groups are likely to behave. For example, Bernays noted that purchasing decisions often appear rational externally while actually emerging from hidden symbolic motives such as status, prestige, competition, or emotional insecurity. A consumer may claim to purchase a car for practical reasons while unconsciously desiring the social recognition associated with ownership. The propagandist identifies these hidden drives and aligns products, political ideas, or social causes with them symbolically. Earlier forms of propaganda relied upon mechanical repetition, assuming that constant exposure alone could create habits or convictions. Bernays argued that modern propaganda had become more sophisticated because it recognized the importance of group leaders, emotional symbols, and social authority in directing public behavior. Individuals frequently imitate respected authorities or social leaders without independent evaluation, allowing propagandists to influence large populations indirectly by targeting influential figures first. When leadership is absent, people fall back upon simplified clichés, familiar phrases, and symbolic imagery to orient themselves within complex situations. Propaganda therefore functions through the creation of emotional shortcuts enabling rapid collective interpretation. Bernays emphasized that successful propaganda involves constructing circumstances rather than merely issuing commands. Events, environments, endorsements, ceremonies, and symbols are carefully designed to produce emotional responses aligning with desired outcomes. A product displayed within a luxurious setting acquires symbolic prestige through association, while political movements gain legitimacy through patriotic imagery or moral symbolism. Even when audiences become aware of propaganda techniques, the emotional mechanisms underlying them continue to function because they resonate with deep-seated psychological needs for belonging, recognition, security, and identity. Bernays revealed that modern society increasingly operates through symbolic engineering where public behavior is guided not only through laws and institutions but through invisible psychological structures embedded within communication itself. Propaganda becomes an essential instrument of both

business and politics because industrial civilization requires methods for coordinating mass populations through emotional influence rather than direct force alone. The modern world thus emerges as a psychological environment continuously organized through symbols, narratives, leaders, and mediated desires capable of shaping consciousness while preserving the illusion of independent thought.

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The Feminization of Influence: Organized Persuasion and the Collective Voice

In *Propaganda*, Edward L. Bernays examines the emergence of women's organized political and social activity in modern America as one of the clearest demonstrations of how propaganda functions within democratic society, arguing that legal equality alone did not define the transformation of women's public influence because true power emerged through collective organization, strategic communication, and the intelligent manipulation of public opinion. Bernays observed that although women had achieved formal political rights, their influence continued to develop through social and cultural channels distinct from those traditionally occupied by men. Women did not merely imitate masculine political structures but created networks of organized activity rooted in shared social concerns, moral reform movements, education campaigns, and welfare initiatives. Through these collective structures women learned to transform minority positions into publicly accepted causes by mastering the mechanisms of modern persuasion. Bernays considered this development especially significant because it revealed how organized communication allows groups lacking traditional institutional authority to exert substantial influence over legislation, administrative policy, and public morality. Women's organizations demonstrated that political power no longer depended exclusively upon direct control of governmental offices or visible leadership roles. Instead, influence could be exercised indirectly through coordinated campaigns capable of shaping social attitudes, directing public attention, and pressuring political institutions symbolically. The suffrage movement itself represented for Bernays one of the most important examples of successful modern propaganda because it transformed an initially marginalized demand into a broadly accepted democratic principle through persistent strategic communication. The movement did not succeed merely because of moral argumentation alone but because its organizers understood how to mobilize emotional symbols, public demonstrations, media coverage, organizational networks, and persuasive narratives capable of reframing women's political participation as socially legitimate and historically necessary. Bernays noted that even after achieving suffrage, women continued applying the techniques learned during these campaigns to broader political and social objectives. Modern propaganda therefore became an instrument through which organized women's groups compensated for their relative lack of direct political experience by mastering the symbolic dimensions of democratic influence. Public opinion increasingly operated as a field where disciplined communication and coordinated messaging could outweigh traditional forms of authority. Women's political organizations revealed that the structure of democratic power had shifted from purely institutional dominance toward the management of perception and collective emotion through media, organization, and symbolic legitimacy. Bernays viewed this transformation as evidence that modern democracy functions through organized persuasion as much as through formal constitutional mechanisms.

The effectiveness of women's organizations depended largely upon their ability to construct disciplined communication systems capable of translating social concerns into coordinated political pressure. Bernays described how groups such as the Legislative Committee of Fourteen Women's Organizations united associations including the League of Women Voters, the YWCA, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and the Federation of Women's Clubs into a collective apparatus devoted to shaping legislation and public opinion simultaneously. These organizations did not merely express opinions passively but designed comprehensive legislative programs and then employed propaganda techniques systematically to secure public and political support for them. Through pamphlets, election guides, educational campaigns, correspondence courses, public lectures, citizenship classes, and organized publicity efforts, women's groups created alternative channels of communication capable of influencing both voters and lawmakers. Bernays emphasized that their achievements demonstrated the growing power of strategic persuasion within democratic systems. Legislative victories such as securing an eight-hour workday for women, shaping prohibition policies, and supporting maternity welfare programs through the Shepard-Towner Bill emerged not simply from electoral participation but from sustained propaganda efforts capable of framing these issues morally and socially within the public imagination. Women's organizations understood that political influence required more than direct lobbying because public opinion itself had become the decisive battlefield where legitimacy is established before laws are passed. Bernays attributed much of this success to figures such as Mrs. Frank Vanderlip, Mrs. Mitchell, Alice Ames Winter, Doris Stevens, Alice Paul, and others who developed expertise in public influence during the suffrage era and later transferred those skills into broader reform movements. These activists became pioneers of modern public relations techniques, using organization, symbolism, repetition, and media coordination to transform social welfare causes into matters of national concern. Bernays argued that the suffrage movement functioned as a training ground where women learned to employ every available propagandistic instrument against resistant majorities. Once these methods proved successful, they were adapted to peacetime campaigns involving child welfare, public health, education, labor reform, and economic rights for married women. The modern democratic public sphere increasingly rewarded those capable of organizing communication effectively rather than merely possessing formal political authority. Women's organizations demonstrated that collective influence depends upon the disciplined coordination of symbols, narratives, and public attention. Through continuous educational outreach and carefully structured publicity campaigns, these groups transformed social activism into a sophisticated system of persuasion capable of reshaping legislation and altering public attitudes gradually over time. Bernays recognized that propaganda allows minority ideas to gain visibility and legitimacy within democratic society precisely because organized communication amplifies voices that might otherwise remain politically marginal. The public relations techniques employed by women's organizations therefore reflected broader transformations occurring within modern democracy itself, where organized persuasion increasingly mediates the relationship between citizens, institutions, and political power.

Beneath Bernays' discussion of women's propaganda activities lies a broader philosophical insight into the nature of democratic influence in mass society. Modern civilization, according to Bernays, no longer functions through isolated individuals acting independently but through organized groups competing symbolically for public attention, legitimacy, and moral authority. Women's organizations provided a particularly vivid example of this process because they transformed social reform into a communicative struggle fought through media narratives, emotional appeals, educational campaigns, and coordinated organizational pressure. Bernays deliberately focused on women's accomplishments because they illustrated how minority groups can overcome

institutional weakness by mastering the techniques of persuasion and symbolic management. Propaganda in this context becomes less an instrument of crude deception than a mechanism for mobilizing collective identity and directing emotional energy toward political objectives. Yet Bernays' admiration for these techniques also reveals the ambiguous ethical terrain of modern public relations. The same methods capable of advancing social welfare reforms and democratic participation can equally be employed for manipulative or authoritarian purposes. Organized persuasion functions independently of moral content because its effectiveness depends upon psychological coordination rather than ethical truth. Women's organizations succeeded because they understood how to shape public perception strategically through emotionally resonant symbols connected to motherhood, welfare, morality, citizenship, and social responsibility. These symbolic appeals transformed specific political demands into broadly acceptable moral causes within the public imagination. Bernays recognized that modern publics rarely respond to abstract policy discussions alone. Instead, collective attitudes are shaped through narratives capable of connecting political issues to emotional desires, fears, and identities embedded within social life. The growing sophistication of women's propaganda efforts therefore reflected the emergence of a broader communication society in which every political movement, corporation, reform campaign, and ideological struggle depends upon mastery of symbolic influence. Public opinion becomes a constructed reality continuously organized through competing communication networks attempting to define social legitimacy. Women's organizations succeeded because they learned to operate within this environment strategically, understanding that democratic power increasingly resides not only within elections or institutions but within the ability to organize attention, shape narratives, and coordinate emotional consensus across fragmented populations. Bernays viewed this condition as unavoidable within technologically advanced democracies where mass communication systems mediate almost every aspect of public life. The transformation of women into influential political actors through propaganda techniques therefore symbolized a larger historical transition toward a civilization governed through organized communication and symbolic management. The modern democratic citizen lives within a world where collective behavior is guided increasingly through emotional persuasion, coordinated publicity, and institutional narratives designed to channel social energy toward particular goals. Women's organized activism demonstrated that those who understand how to shape public opinion possess the ability to transform minority ideas into dominant social realities, revealing both the empowering and potentially manipulative dimensions of propaganda within modern democratic culture.

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Empire of Persuasion: Corporate Power Behind the Democratic Mask

In *A Century of Spin*, David Miller and William Dinan examine public relations not as a neutral communication profession devoted to mutual understanding, but as a strategic instrument developed by corporate power to shape political systems, control public perception, and secure economic dominance while remaining largely invisible within the historical narrative of modern democracy. Their analysis challenges the comforting illusion that democratic societies are governed primarily through public debate and electoral participation, arguing instead that corporate propaganda has become deeply embedded within the institutional structure of political

life itself. Public relations functions beneath a veil of legitimacy and professional respectability that conceals its central role in organizing ideological consent for business interests. The authors reject the popular fantasy that public relations possesses mysterious or supernatural powers, emphasizing instead that its effectiveness arises from systematic planning, coordinated communication, institutional networking, and long-term ideological struggle carried out over generations. Modern corporate influence depends not upon isolated acts of deception alone but upon the continuous construction of social realities in which corporate priorities appear identical to the public good. Neo-liberal societies increasingly normalize the belief that economic growth, market expansion, and corporate freedom automatically benefit society as a whole, despite mounting evidence of environmental destruction, social inequality, political alienation, and democratic erosion. Public relations serves as the mechanism through which these contradictions are obscured and rationalized. Rather than openly suppressing democratic participation, corporate propaganda redirects political discourse so that citizens gradually internalize the limits of acceptable debate. Democracy survives formally while becoming increasingly insulated from popular demands that threaten concentrated economic power. Miller and Dinan therefore present public relations as a hidden infrastructure of governance operating alongside visible political institutions. The true significance of PR lies not simply in polishing corporate images or influencing isolated consumer choices but in shaping the ideological environment within which governments, media organizations, and populations interpret reality itself. Public relations transforms political conflict into questions of perception management, where legitimacy depends less upon material justice than upon the successful control of narratives, symbols, and public attention. The result is a democratic culture increasingly defined by managed consensus rather than meaningful participation. Corporate communication strategies do not merely respond to public opinion but actively manufacture the conditions through which opinion becomes possible. Public relations thus emerges as one of the most influential yet least visible systems of power within modern capitalist societies.

The concept of “spin” represents only the surface expression of a much broader apparatus of corporate influence extending far beyond media manipulation into the direct organization of political action, ideological warfare, and elite coordination. Initially associated with political image management during election campaigns, spin eventually became a popular shorthand for deceptive communication practices employed by corporations, governments, and lobbying groups. Yet Miller and Dinan argue that the term itself understates the depth of corporate propaganda because it reduces organized systems of influence to isolated acts of distortion or dishonesty. Public relations does not simply alter facts superficially; it constructs entire symbolic environments capable of defining what counts as legitimate knowledge, acceptable policy, and social common sense. The profession consistently portrays itself as promoting mutual understanding, ethical communication, and social harmony, cultivating an image of responsible mediation between institutions and the public. Popular culture often caricatures PR practitioners as cynical manipulators or theatrical deceivers, but such representations obscure the structural nature of their influence. Public relations operates not merely through individual dishonesty but through institutionalized systems designed to align public consciousness with corporate priorities. Miller and Dinan emphasize that the modern term “public relations” itself emerged as a strategic replacement for “propaganda” after the First World War, when propaganda became associated publicly with German wartime manipulation. Edward Bernays and other pioneers of the field understood that the techniques remained essentially identical even if the terminology changed. Rebranding propaganda as public relations allowed corporate influence campaigns to continue under the appearance of democratic communication and professional expertise. The distinction

between spin, propaganda, and public relations therefore becomes largely rhetorical because all involve the strategic shaping of public attitudes through coordinated communication. However, the authors insist that corporate influence extends beyond symbolic persuasion into concrete political action including lobbying, espionage, provocation, dirty tricks, surveillance, and covert manipulation. Public relations cannot be separated from political and economic power because communication strategies are intertwined with institutional networks capable of influencing legislation, regulatory policy, media coverage, and international economic structures simultaneously. The objective is not always enthusiastic public support but often simple compliance. Corporate propaganda seeks to neutralize resistance, fragment opposition, and prevent citizens from mobilizing effectively against policies favoring concentrated wealth and corporate expansion. The manufacture of compliance replaces the democratic ideal of informed consent. Citizens may not fully agree with corporate agendas, yet they become socially and politically conditioned not to challenge them fundamentally. Public relations thereby transforms political passivity into a managed social condition maintained through media narratives, expert discourse, lobbying networks, and ideological repetition. The public sphere increasingly functions as a controlled environment where elite consensus determines the limits of acceptable debate long before ordinary citizens enter the discussion.

Miller and Dinan situate the evolution of public relations within the broader history of corporate political activism and the rise of neo-liberal capitalism, arguing that modern corporate power developed through successive waves of organized ideological struggle designed to subordinate democratic institutions to business interests. The first wave emerged during the early twentieth century in response to the expansion of universal suffrage, when corporations recognized the growing threat posed by mass democracy and labor organization. Public relations became a defensive mechanism intended to preserve elite privileges by reshaping public attitudes toward business and capitalism. The second wave intensified following the Wall Street Crash and the New Deal period, when economic crisis and social reform movements forced corporations to engage in more aggressive political organizing against labor activism and state intervention. This period saw the development of increasingly sophisticated lobbying systems, policy planning networks, and ideological campaigns designed to defend free-market orthodoxy. The third wave emerged between the late 1960s and early 1980s, culminating in the neo-liberal revolutions associated with figures such as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. Corporate power shifted from defensive protection toward offensive transformation, restructuring societies around deregulation, privatization, market liberalization, and financial globalization. Public relations played a central role in legitimizing these changes by framing market capitalism as synonymous with freedom, efficiency, and modernity while portraying democratic regulation, labor organization, and social welfare as outdated obstacles to progress. The resulting neo-liberal order intensified inequality, environmental degradation, and political alienation while simultaneously weakening collective democratic resistance. Miller and Dinan argue that these transformations were not accidental outcomes of economic evolution but products of sustained ideological warfare conducted through networks linking corporations, lobbying groups, think tanks, media institutions, political parties, and policy planning organizations. Drawing upon traditions established by scholars such as C. Wright Mills, they describe how elite networks coordinate communication and political action to reproduce power across generations. Public relations agencies and lobbying firms operate beneath public visibility while shaping policy agendas, influencing media coverage, managing crises, and coordinating alliances among economic and political elites. These hidden structures explain why democratic governments frequently appear more responsive to corporate priorities than to public needs. Events such as the Battle of Seattle protests, anti-war movements following September 11,

and growing environmental crises intensified awareness that corporate power operates globally through systems largely insulated from democratic accountability. Miller and Dinan reveal how public relations has evolved into a transnational infrastructure for manufacturing ideological conformity while masking itself as neutral communication. Corporate social responsibility campaigns, media management strategies, reputation laundering, lobbying efforts, and even covert surveillance practices all contribute to the stabilization of elite consensus within global capitalism. The modern citizen encounters a world where political parties, media narratives, and public institutions increasingly function within frameworks shaped by corporate communication strategies. Democracy survives symbolically while substantive political alternatives are marginalized systematically through organized persuasion and institutional control. Public relations therefore emerges as one of the central technologies of modern power: a mechanism capable of transforming economic interests into social common sense while concealing the structures of influence operating beneath the surface of democratic culture.

Miller, D. and Dinan, W. (2008) A Century of Spin: How Public Relations Became the Cutting Edge of Corporate Power. London: Pluto Press;

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The Chameleons of Power: Propaganda Beneath the Surface of Democracy

In *A Century of Spin*, David Miller and William Dinan portray the history of public relations as a hidden narrative of modern power, comparing PR operatives to Woody Allen's fictional character Leonard Zelig—a human chameleon who appears beside the powerful at every historical moment while remaining strangely invisible within official memory. This metaphor captures the essential condition of public relations within modern political and corporate systems. PR specialists exist near the center of influence, shaping narratives, constructing legitimacy, and directing public interpretation, yet their role is often concealed behind the visible actions of governments, corporations, celebrities, and political leaders. Like Zelig, they adapt themselves to every environment, blending seamlessly into systems of authority while disguising their own presence. Miller and Dinan argue that this invisibility is not accidental but fundamental to the success of propaganda itself. Public relations achieves its greatest effectiveness precisely when its operations remain unnoticed. The text opens with the dramatic suicide of Edward von Kloborg III in Rome in 2005, a symbolic figure whose extravagant life embodied the moral ambiguity and theatrical excess of the public relations industry. Known as the “tyrants’ lobbyist,” von Kloborg openly represented dictators, military regimes, and authoritarian governments without apparent shame or ideological hesitation. His career illustrated one of the profession's most revealing characteristics: loyalty not to truth or democratic principles but to the strategic management of reputation. Von Kloborg believed no client was beyond representation because public relations, like law, functions according to service rather than morality. This philosophy exposes the deeper logic of corporate propaganda, where perception itself becomes detached from ethical substance. Dictators, corporations, and governments all seek legitimacy through carefully managed narratives capable of neutralizing criticism and reframing atrocities as misunderstandings, necessities, or unfortunate accidents. The flamboyant character of von Kloborg may appear extreme, yet Miller and Dinan insist that he merely dramatized tendencies present throughout the industry as a whole. PR operatives routinely position themselves near centers of economic and political power, serving as technical experts in persuasion who ensure that institutions can pursue controversial objectives

while minimizing public resistance. Their role is often absent from official histories because successful propaganda conceals its mechanisms behind the appearance of spontaneity, neutrality, and common sense. Public relations therefore operates as an invisible infrastructure supporting modern systems of authority. Corporate and governmental interests rely upon specialists capable of shaping public narratives without exposing the strategic processes underlying them. This hidden dimension of modern communication reveals that democratic societies are governed not only through elections and visible institutions but through unseen networks of symbolic management shaping how reality itself is interpreted by the public.

The historical development of public relations demonstrates how propaganda evolved from wartime persuasion into a permanent instrument of corporate and political power operating continuously within democratic societies. Miller and Dinan trace these origins through figures such as Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays, whose careers established many of the techniques that continue to define modern PR. Long before total war institutionalized propaganda formally, corporations and governments in both the United States and Britain had already begun experimenting with methods for manipulating public perception strategically. Ivy Lee's work for John D. Rockefeller following the Ludlow massacre revealed how corporate propaganda could transform violent repression into a narrative of misunderstood industrial necessity. Lee's publicity materials blamed labor unrest on outside agitators while attacking union organizers such as Mother Jones, reframing corporate violence as defensive action against disorder. More importantly, Lee openly acknowledged that facts themselves possess no fixed meaning independent of interpretation. Public opinion responds less to objective events than to the manner in which those events are narrated, published, and emotionally framed. This philosophy became central to modern public relations because it implied that reality itself can be managed symbolically through selective presentation and strategic interpretation. Facts become flexible instruments subordinated to narrative objectives. Edward Bernays expanded these methods by integrating psychological manipulation into mass communication campaigns. His famous orchestration of women smoking publicly during the "Torches of Freedom" campaign demonstrated how propaganda could reshape social norms by connecting consumer behavior to emotional symbols of liberation and modern identity. The young women participating in the Easter parade did not realize they were actors within a carefully designed publicity event. Their apparent spontaneity generated authenticity precisely because the orchestrated nature of the campaign remained hidden. Bernays understood that modern propaganda succeeds most effectively when audiences perceive manipulated events as natural social developments rather than strategic interventions. Both Lee and Bernays emerged from wartime propaganda systems that demonstrated the extraordinary capacity of coordinated communication to mobilize populations emotionally. During the First World War propagandists such as Bernays, Walter Lippmann, Carl Byoir, and Arthur W. Page collaborated with government agencies to shape public opinion systematically in support of military objectives. The war revealed that modern populations could be directed through emotional narratives, patriotic symbolism, and media coordination on an unprecedented scale. After witnessing this success, Bernays concluded that techniques developed for war could be adapted equally well for peace, consumer markets, corporate legitimacy, and political management. British propagandists followed similar trajectories. Figures such as Basil Clarke pioneered "propaganda by news" during the Irish conflict, emphasizing that effective propaganda must appear truthful, complete, and candid in order to gain credibility. By presenting manipulation through the appearance of honesty, propagandists learned to shape public interpretation subtly rather than through overt coercion. The transition from wartime propaganda to peacetime public relations occurred seamlessly because both systems relied upon the same fundamental principle: the strategic organization of perception

through communication. Public relations thus emerged not as an accidental profession but as the institutionalization of propaganda within democratic capitalism.

The deeper implications of Miller and Dinan's analysis lie in their demonstration that public relations evolved into a global system for manufacturing legitimacy on behalf of corporate and political power while concealing the structures of influence behind democratic appearances. The connections between propaganda and authoritarianism became particularly disturbing during the rise of Nazi Germany, when figures such as Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays discovered that their theories and techniques had influenced Joseph Goebbels and the machinery of anti-Semitic propaganda. Bernays later expressed shock upon learning that Goebbels possessed his work *Crystallizing Public Opinion* and used its principles systematically. Yet the authors suggest that the distinction between democratic propaganda and authoritarian propaganda remains more unstable than PR professionals often admit. Both systems depend upon manipulating symbols, emotional associations, media narratives, and public psychology in order to shape collective behavior. Carl Byoir's use of front groups during campaigns defending chain stores demonstrated how corporations manufactured the appearance of grassroots public support while concealing the economic interests directing the operation. Such techniques became foundational to modern lobbying and political advocacy. Public relations increasingly relied upon invisible networks, trade associations, fake citizens' groups, and media alliances capable of influencing public opinion indirectly while disguising the true sources of power. After the Second World War many individuals trained in military intelligence and wartime propaganda moved effortlessly into corporate PR, carrying with them methods refined through psychological warfare and state communication campaigns. Firms established by figures such as Dan Edelman, Alfred Fleishman, and Harold Burson became central institutions within global corporate influence networks. The continuity between wartime propaganda and peacetime public relations reveals that modern democracies absorbed techniques originally developed for psychological conflict and applied them permanently to consumer culture, political management, and corporate governance. Miller and Dinan further expose the ethical contradictions within the profession through examples of practitioners openly acknowledging deception as an ordinary aspect of their work. Some PR executives argued candidly that lying forms an inevitable component of maintaining appearances on behalf of clients, revealing how the industry often values strategic effectiveness above truthfulness itself. Public relations therefore emerges not simply as communication but as a system for organizing social perception in ways favorable to concentrated power. From corporate image management and anti-communist campaigns to regime changes, lobbying operations, and media manipulation, PR operatives repeatedly appear beside major political and economic events while remaining largely invisible to public consciousness. Their influence extends across domestic and international politics, shaping how populations understand wars, corporations, crises, and social conflicts. Miller and Dinan ultimately reveal that public relations functions as a hidden architecture of modern power where propaganda becomes normalized within democratic culture itself. The citizen inhabits a world saturated with strategic narratives produced by institutions skilled in emotional engineering and symbolic manipulation. Public relations specialists operate like Zelig precisely because they disappear into every system they serve, blending with political authority, corporate ambition, media spectacle, and ideological conflict while masking the structures of influence guiding public perception. The true power of propaganda lies not merely in deceiving isolated individuals but in constructing the symbolic environment within which societies define truth, legitimacy, morality, and reality itself.

Miller, D. and Dinan, W. (2008) *A Century of Spin: How Public Relations Became the Cutting Edge of Corporate Power*. London: Pluto Press;

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The Counterattack of Capital: Propaganda Against Democratic Society

In *A Century of Spin*, David Miller and William Dinan describe the period between 1936 and 1950 as the second great wave of corporate propaganda, a decisive historical moment in which business interests in the United States and later the United Kingdom mobilized sophisticated systems of public relations, ideological warfare, and political organization to defend capitalism against growing democratic pressures unleashed by economic collapse, labor militancy, and demands for social reform. The Wall Street Crash and the Great Depression shattered public faith in unregulated capitalism and exposed the vulnerability of economic systems previously celebrated as symbols of permanent prosperity. Across the United States anger toward monopolies, oligarchic wealth, and corporate irresponsibility intensified, creating fertile ground for Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal coalition. Roosevelt's electoral victories and his rhetoric against selfishness, concentrated power, and economic exploitation alarmed business leaders who increasingly perceived democratic reform not merely as political opposition but as a direct threat to the survival of corporate authority itself. The New Deal introduced labor protections, regulatory structures, and social welfare measures that challenged the unrestricted power corporations had enjoyed during the previous decades. Business elites therefore concluded that economic influence alone was insufficient for preserving their position. Public opinion itself had become a battlefield requiring systematic management through propaganda, lobbying, media coordination, and ideological organization. Corporate leaders recognized that unless they could reshape the moral and political imagination of the public, democratic pressures might gradually erode the legitimacy of capitalism itself. The National Association of Manufacturers emerged as one of the central instruments in this struggle. Controlled increasingly by a group of highly organized and class-conscious executives known informally as the "brass hats," the organization transformed itself into a propaganda apparatus dedicated to defending free enterprise against labor movements, socialist ideas, and government intervention. Robert Lund and other industrial leaders argued openly that business needed to educate the public in order to counter what they described as misinformation spread by unions, radicals, and reformers. Corporate propaganda during this period ceased to focus narrowly on individual companies and instead began promoting capitalism itself as a moral and patriotic system inseparable from freedom, democracy, and national identity. Public relations evolved from defensive publicity into ideological warfare designed to shape the entire framework through which citizens interpreted economics, politics, and social conflict. Millions of Americans were exposed continuously to narratives portraying free enterprise as synonymous with liberty while depicting labor organization, collectivism, and state intervention as threats to civilization itself. The struggle therefore moved beyond isolated policy disputes and became a contest over the symbolic foundations of democratic society. Business leaders understood that controlling public opinion meant controlling the emotional vocabulary through which citizens defined freedom, order, prosperity, and patriotism. Corporate propaganda transformed economic ideology into cultural common sense.

One of the most revealing dimensions of this second wave of corporate activism was the development of systematic anti-union propaganda and psychological warfare techniques intended

to suppress labor organization while preserving the appearance of democratic legitimacy. As labor unions fought to secure collective bargaining rights under the National Labor Act of 1935, corporations increasingly abandoned purely economic confrontation in favor of sophisticated propaganda campaigns designed to isolate unions socially and morally. The most notorious example emerged through the so-called Mohawk Valley formula developed during the 1936–37 Remington Rand strike under the direction of James Rand, an intensely anti-union industrialist known for his brutality and manipulation. This strategy represented a carefully coordinated plan for industrial warfare combining media propaganda, intimidation, emotional symbolism, and staged public performances in order to break strikes and undermine labor solidarity. Union leaders were systematically portrayed as outside agitators, radicals, or communists threatening community stability and national order. Employers threatened plant relocation to create fear among local populations while mobilizing police, vigilantes, newspapers, and loyal employees against strikers. The tactic relied heavily upon invoking “law and order” rhetoric capable of transforming economic disputes into moral conflicts between respectable citizens and supposedly dangerous subversives. The National Association of Manufacturers distributed this formula widely, effectively institutionalizing propaganda as a weapon of class conflict. The National Labor Relations Board later condemned the Mohawk Valley formula as a blueprint for industrial war because it revealed how corporations manipulated public opinion strategically in order to weaken democratic labor movements. During the Johnstown steel strike of 1937 these techniques were applied with extraordinary intensity. Employers working alongside corporate organizations flooded communities with propaganda portraying union organizers as enemies of local prosperity and national security. By reframing labor activism as ideological extremism rather than economic self-defense, corporations succeeded in dividing workers from surrounding communities and weakening public sympathy for collective bargaining. Miller and Dinan show that these campaigns represented more than isolated anti-union tactics. They formed part of a broader transformation in corporate communication where public relations became an instrument for reorganizing political consciousness itself. Business propaganda no longer sought merely to protect profits but to redefine the moral boundaries of acceptable political thought. Free enterprise was elevated into an almost sacred principle while dissenting economic ideas were stigmatized as threats to freedom and social stability. The techniques pioneered during these labor conflicts demonstrated that corporate power increasingly depended upon controlling narratives and emotional perceptions rather than relying solely upon economic coercion. Propaganda became central to preserving capitalist legitimacy during periods of social unrest because it allowed corporations to transform class conflict into symbolic struggles over patriotism, morality, and national identity. Modern public relations thus emerged as a system for disciplining democratic imagination itself by narrowing the range of politically acceptable alternatives.

The second wave of corporate propaganda eventually expanded beyond immediate defensive struggles and evolved into a far more ambitious ideological offensive aimed at reshaping the intellectual foundations of Western political culture. While corporations initially mobilized against the New Deal and labor movements, many business leaders and conservative intellectuals soon realized that tactical victories alone would not secure long-term dominance. Democratic and Keynesian ideas continued to influence public life strongly after the Second World War, especially in Europe where demands for public ownership, welfare states, and economic planning gained widespread support. In Britain organizations such as Aims of Industry and the Economic League emerged to defend private enterprise against nationalization and social democracy. These groups targeted not only politicians but ordinary citizens, youth organizations, housewives, schools, and local communities through propaganda campaigns designed to associate socialism with

inefficiency, dependency, and authoritarianism. The sugar industry's "Tate not State!" campaign symbolized this broader strategy of embedding pro-business ideology into everyday culture through slogans, mascots, and emotionally resonant imagery. Yet the most significant development occurred through the emergence of intellectual networks dedicated to rebuilding the philosophical legitimacy of capitalism itself. Friedrich von Hayek and the founding of the Mont Pelerin Society in 1947 marked a decisive turning point in the evolution of corporate propaganda. Hayek and his associates understood that political transformation begins with intellectual transformation. Rather than attempting to persuade mass publics directly, they sought to influence scholars, journalists, economists, educators, and policy elites who would gradually reshape public discourse over time. The Mont Pelerin Society functioned as a strategic network devoted to reversing the spread of collectivist ideas and reestablishing free-market ideology as the dominant framework of modern society. From this movement emerged a vast infrastructure of think tanks, policy institutes, academic networks, and media organizations dedicated to promoting neo-liberal economic thought. In Britain the Institute of Economic Affairs became one of the most influential institutions in this ideological counterrevolution. Guided by figures such as Anthony Fisher and Arthur Seldon, and later amplified through media allies like William Rees Mogg, the IEA worked systematically to challenge Keynesian economics, welfare policies, and democratic intervention in markets. Through publications, research programs, media engagement, and elite networking, these institutions reshaped political language itself until market liberalization, deregulation, and privatization gradually appeared not as ideological choices but as inevitable economic necessities. Miller and Dinan demonstrate that this transformation was neither spontaneous nor purely intellectual. It represented the culmination of decades of organized propaganda and strategic communication carried out by interconnected corporate, political, and intellectual networks determined to restore and expand corporate power. The second wave of corporate propaganda therefore laid the ideological foundations for the neo-liberal revolutions associated later with Thatcherism and Reaganism. Public relations became inseparable from political economy itself because the management of ideas, emotions, and public narratives proved essential for reorganizing democratic societies around corporate priorities. The battle over public opinion ultimately became a battle over reality itself, where those capable of shaping the symbolic environment acquired the power to define what societies consider natural, rational, and possible.

Miller, D. and Dinan, W. (2008) A Century of Spin: How Public Relations Became the Cutting Edge of Corporate Power. London: Pluto Press;

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The Corporate Counterrevolution: The Global Architecture of Manufactured Consent

In *A Century of Spin*, David Miller and William Dinan describe the third wave of corporate propaganda as the decisive transformation of corporate activism from defensive resistance against democratic reform into a coordinated global offensive designed to reconstruct political culture, reshape economic ideology, and institutionalize neo-liberal capitalism as the dominant framework of modern governance. The intellectual roots of this transformation lay within the Mont Pelerin Society, whose influence spread gradually through think tanks, lobbying networks, policy institutes, media organizations, and political parties until free-market ideology became normalized across much of the Western world. What began as a relatively small intellectual movement

founded around Friedrich von Hayek after the Second World War evolved into one of the most effective propaganda systems in modern political history. Its central achievement was not merely electoral victory but the reorganization of public consciousness itself. The remnants of political traditions once committed to social democracy, labor rights, or collective welfare were gradually neutralized as free-market assumptions penetrated mainstream political discourse. Margaret Thatcher's rise to power in 1979 symbolized this ideological victory. Her acknowledgment that institutions such as the Institute of Economic Affairs had rebuilt the philosophical foundations of conservatism revealed the enormous influence of think tanks operating beneath the surface of visible electoral politics. The IEA became a prototype for a worldwide network of more than one hundred free-market policy organizations devoted to disseminating neo-liberal doctrine globally. Miller and Dinan argue that this shift represented more than ordinary political change. It was the result of decades of carefully coordinated propaganda, elite planning, and ideological engineering conducted by corporate interests determined to reverse the democratic gains achieved during the earlier twentieth century. The social unrest and radicalism of the late 1960s intensified corporate fears dramatically. Student protests, labor militancy, anti-war activism, feminist movements, and demands for greater democratic participation convinced many corporate leaders that capitalism itself faced a cultural and ideological crisis. Organizations such as Aims of Industry and the Economic League increasingly viewed democratic reform movements not simply as political opposition but as existential threats to corporate power. New organizations emerged to coordinate more aggressive forms of ideological warfare. In Britain the Institute for the Study of Conflict, funded partly through intelligence-linked networks, became an important mechanism for studying and countering what corporate and state elites described as subversive influences within industry and society. Reports warning about industrial conflict and left-wing activism circulated secretly among business leaders, while coordinated propaganda campaigns attempted to portray labor movements and democratic reformers as dangerous enemies of national stability. Anti-Labour advertising campaigns employing fear, Cold War imagery, and symbolic manipulation flooded public discourse. The struggle over democracy increasingly resembled a covert war fought through information, propaganda, lobbying, intelligence collaboration, and strategic communication. Corporate activism evolved beyond public relations into a broader system for managing political reality itself.

The escalation of corporate political warfare during the 1970s revealed how deeply sections of the business elite, intelligence networks, and conservative activists feared the expansion of democratic influence over economic life. Miller and Dinan show that organizations such as the Freedom Association, Aims of Industry, the Economic League, and the Institute for the Study of Conflict functioned not merely as advocacy groups but as components within a larger ideological infrastructure dedicated to protecting corporate privilege. During the governments of Harold Wilson and Edward Heath, anxieties among sections of the upper classes intensified into discussions bordering upon anti-democratic conspiracy. Elements connected to intelligence agencies, business organizations, military circles, and elite social networks entertained fears that Britain was drifting toward collapse or socialist takeover. Rumors portraying Wilson as a Soviet agent circulated widely within elite circles, while secret contingency discussions explored the possibility of authoritarian intervention should democratic government threaten established interests too severely. These fears produced what Miller and Dinan describe as the activist arm of the ideological war against democracy. Propaganda merged with covert operations, dirty tricks, surveillance, and media manipulation in order to destabilize reformist politics and preserve elite authority. Keith Joseph emerged as one of the central architects of this transformation. Unlike earlier institutions such as the IEA, Joseph's Centre for Policy Studies embraced openly political

objectives, seeking not merely to influence intellectual debate but to convert the Conservative Party itself into a vehicle for neo-liberal ideology. Working with systems analysts, corporate strategists, and marketing experts, Joseph helped develop a comprehensive narrative presenting trade unions, state intervention, and social democracy as the root causes of Britain's economic and social problems. Public opinion had to be prepared systematically for policies aimed at dismantling labor power, privatizing industries, and restructuring society around market principles. Groups such as the National Association for Freedom emerged to wage direct confrontations against trade unions during disputes such as Grunwick, employing aggressive tactics, symbolic operations, and media campaigns intended to weaken collective labor resistance. Miller and Dinan emphasize that these developments were not isolated British phenomena but part of a transatlantic movement linking UK and US neo-liberal activists through shared institutions, intellectual frameworks, and strategic collaboration. The founders of the Adam Smith Institute worked closely with figures connected to the Heritage Foundation and other American conservative think tanks, demonstrating how ideas, personnel, and propaganda strategies circulated internationally. In the United States similar concerns about declining public support for business led to the emergence of coordinated corporate lobbying efforts on an unprecedented scale. Lewis Powell's confidential memorandum warning about attacks on free enterprise became a blueprint for organized corporate counterattack. The creation of the Business Roundtable in 1972 unified the CEOs of America's largest corporations into a single political force capable of coordinating lobbying, influencing legislation, and shaping public discourse nationally. Corporate activism entered a new phase where long-term strategic planning replaced fragmented defensive campaigns. Public relations, lobbying, policy institutes, media alliances, and legal activism merged into a comprehensive project aimed at restructuring government itself around corporate priorities. Democracy increasingly became subordinate to organized economic power operating through coordinated ideological networks.

The globalization of neo-liberal capitalism during the late twentieth century represented the culmination of this third wave of corporate propaganda, where transnational elite organizations constructed systems of governance increasingly insulated from democratic accountability while presenting free-market globalization as inevitable historical progress. Miller and Dinan trace the emergence of interconnected global lobbying and policy-planning structures including the International Chamber of Commerce, the Bilderberg Group, the Trilateral Commission, the World Economic Forum, the European Round Table of Industrialists, and the TransAtlantic Business Dialogue. These institutions functioned as elite coordination networks where political leaders, corporate executives, bankers, economists, and media figures developed consensus around policies favoring deregulation, privatization, free trade, and corporate integration across national borders. Figures such as Peter Sutherland embodied this transnational power elite. Without ever being democratically elected to global office, individuals like Sutherland exercised enormous influence over international trade systems, financial governance, and economic policy through their positions within corporations, global institutions, and elite policy groups. Miller and Dinan emphasize that these networks do not constitute a formal world government in the simplistic conspiratorial sense. Rather, they operate as spaces where elite consensus is forged and where corporate interests shape the ideological assumptions guiding global governance. Decisions emerging from organizations such as the IMF, WTO, and G8 increasingly reflected priorities developed within these elite planning structures. The globalization of lobbying expanded dramatically during the 1970s and 1980s as corporations established extensive lobbying operations in Washington, Brussels, and international institutions. Trade agreements such as NAFTA were presented publicly as instruments of economic cooperation while functioning in practice as mechanisms securing favorable conditions for transnational corporations including cheap labor,

deregulation, and weakened democratic oversight. Public relations played a crucial role in legitimizing these transformations by framing neo-liberal globalization as synonymous with modernization, freedom, and prosperity. Yet resistance to this corporate order also intensified. Events such as the Battle of Seattle and the growth of global justice movements revealed that significant democratic opposition continued to challenge the concentration of transnational corporate power. Anti-globalization activists, environmental movements, labor organizations, human rights groups, and anti-war coalitions exposed the contradictions of a system claiming to promote freedom while concentrating authority within unelected economic institutions. Miller and Dinan conclude that the struggle between corporate propaganda and democratic accountability remains unresolved. The third wave of corporate activism succeeded in constructing a powerful global architecture capable of shaping policy, influencing governments, and organizing public opinion internationally. Nevertheless, the persistence of social resistance demonstrates that democratic impulses continue to challenge the legitimacy of systems designed to subordinate public interests to corporate priorities. Public relations, lobbying, think tanks, and elite planning groups collectively transformed capitalism from a national economic system into a transnational ideological order sustained through continuous propaganda and symbolic management. Modern governance increasingly functions through the invisible coordination of economic and political elites whose influence operates beneath the surface of democratic institutions. The corporate counterrevolution therefore reshaped not only economic policy but the very structure of political imagination itself, redefining what societies consider possible, rational, and inevitable within the modern world.

Miller, D. and Dinan, W. (2008) A Century of Spin: How Public Relations Became the Cutting Edge of Corporate Power. London: Pluto Press;

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The Empire of Influence: Global Public Relations and the Corporate Order

In *A Century of Spin*, David Miller and William Dinan present the global public relations industry as one of the central infrastructures sustaining modern corporate capitalism, arguing that the worldwide expansion of multinational corporations and neo-liberal governance would have been impossible without the simultaneous globalization of propaganda, lobbying, and strategic communication. The rise of global capitalism required more than economic investment or military power alone; it demanded a sophisticated apparatus capable of manufacturing legitimacy, shaping public perception, neutralizing resistance, and organizing political consent across continents. Public relations became the invisible language of global corporate expansion, operating behind the scenes to ensure that the interests of multinational corporations appeared synonymous with economic progress, modernization, and democratic development. Leslie Sklair's observation that global capitalism must remain politically active captures the fundamental insight underlying the text: capitalism survives not merely through production and markets but through continuous ideological management. PR firms, lobbying organizations, communication consultancies, media strategists, and corporate image specialists collectively form a transnational system of influence designed to protect and expand corporate power within increasingly interconnected political environments. From its earliest beginnings, public relations possessed an international dimension. Ivy Lee's involvement with Nazi Germany and the global operations of corporations such as Shell revealed that corporations understood early on the necessity of managing reputation beyond

national borders. As multinational corporations expanded during the twentieth century, the scale of public relations activity expanded alongside them, eventually becoming inseparable from the architecture of global governance itself. Miller and Dinan reject the common assumption that public relations consists mainly of small firms concerned with superficial image management. In reality, the industry evolved into a highly concentrated global network encompassing not only traditional PR agencies but advertising conglomerates, lobbying firms, financial communications consultancies, media organizations, event management companies, sponsorship agencies, and digital communication systems. Public relations became integrated into nearly every mechanism through which modern societies produce and circulate information. A handful of enormous transnational communications conglomerates now dominate the industry, controlling vast networks of subsidiary firms capable of influencing governments, corporations, financial markets, and public opinion simultaneously. The globalization of PR therefore reflects the broader consolidation of corporate power under neo-liberal capitalism. Communication itself becomes concentrated within institutions whose interests align closely with multinational business elites. Public discourse increasingly emerges from environments structured by organizations specializing in persuasion, reputation management, and ideological coordination. The modern citizen inhabits a world where economic power and communication power merge into a single system capable of shaping both policy and perception on a planetary scale.

The biographies and activities of major PR figures and corporations illustrate how deeply integrated public relations has become within political authority, corporate strategy, and ideological management. Tim Bell emerged as one of the most recognizable symbols of the British spin culture accompanying the neo-liberal revolution of the 1980s and 1990s. Beginning at Saatchi & Saatchi before becoming a close adviser to Margaret Thatcher, Bell embodied the transformation of politics into media-managed spectacle where image construction became inseparable from governance itself. His rise reflected the increasing importance of professional persuasion within electoral politics, while his connections to conglomerates such as WPP revealed the growing concentration of communication power within transnational corporate networks. Miller and Dinan emphasize that firms such as Hill & Knowlton and Burson-Marsteller achieved global prominence not merely through advertising expertise but through their willingness to represent controversial governments, authoritarian regimes, and multinational corporations seeking legitimacy during moments of crisis. Hill & Knowlton's orchestration of the fabricated testimony by Nayirah during the lead-up to the Gulf War demonstrated how propaganda could influence international politics directly by manipulating emotional narratives within media systems. The story of Iraqi soldiers allegedly removing babies from incubators generated outrage powerful enough to shape congressional debates and public support for military intervention before later being exposed as a staged deception connected to the Kuwaiti monarchy. Such campaigns reveal that public relations extends far beyond ordinary publicity into the realm of geopolitical influence and psychological warfare. Burson-Marsteller similarly developed a reputation for rehabilitating the public images of controversial corporations and governments, demonstrating how reputation management functions as a form of political technology within global capitalism. The consolidation of firms like Hill & Knowlton, Burson-Marsteller, Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide, and Cohn & Wolfe under conglomerates such as WPP illustrates the extraordinary concentration of communication power characterizing the contemporary media environment. These corporations employ tens of thousands of professionals across thousands of offices worldwide, allowing them to coordinate campaigns spanning multiple continents and political systems simultaneously. Public relations increasingly merges with advertising, marketing, finance, entertainment, and journalism, blurring distinctions between information,

persuasion, and propaganda. Miller and Dinan further demonstrate how the industry actively facilitated privatization and neo-liberal restructuring globally. Firms specializing initially in financial public relations during the privatization campaigns of the 1980s exported their expertise internationally as state-owned industries were sold to private investors across Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Public relations therefore became an operational mechanism for advancing policies aimed at reducing public ownership while enhancing corporate profitability. The growth of the British PR industry itself reflected the dismantling of the post-war social democratic consensus. As Thatcherism weakened unions, privatized industries, and promoted market competition, corporations and governments increasingly relied upon communication specialists to manage industrial relations, shape employee attitudes, and justify economic transformation publicly. The dramatic expansion of the PR industry during this period symbolized the broader transition toward societies governed increasingly through symbolic management and media coordination rather than direct political participation. Public relations became embedded within the infrastructure of neo-liberal governance itself.

The globalization of public relations ultimately created a transnational communication system integrated directly into elite policy networks and centers of global decision-making, transforming PR firms from service providers into active participants within the construction of global corporate governance. Miller and Dinan trace how multinational corporations brought their in-house public relations operations into emerging markets across Asia, Africa, and the Middle East during the post-war decades. PR practices established during colonial administration often survived independence, particularly within former British colonies where state communication systems retained strong ties to earlier imperial models of information management. As global capitalism expanded, major PR firms clustered strategically around political and economic centers such as Washington, Brussels, London, New York, Tokyo, Hong Kong, and Beijing. These hubs became sites where lobbying, public relations, corporate strategy, and political influence converged. Tens of thousands of lobbyists and communication professionals now operate around institutions such as the European Union, the US Congress, the WTO, and transnational regulatory bodies. Public relations agencies do not simply respond to policy decisions after they occur; they participate actively in shaping the agendas, narratives, and ideological assumptions guiding policy formation itself. Major conglomerates including WPP, Omnicom, Interpublic, and Publicis dominate global communication markets through mergers, acquisitions, and integrated service networks spanning advertising, lobbying, financial consulting, digital media, and public affairs. Their influence extends deeply into elite planning organizations such as the Trilateral Commission, the World Economic Forum, and the Council on Foreign Relations. Figures like Sir Martin Sorrell exemplify how communication executives themselves become members of the transnational policy elite, participating directly in the strategic coordination of global economic and political agendas. PR firms therefore occupy a dual role within contemporary capitalism: they manage perception externally while simultaneously participating internally within elite governance networks. Public relations becomes both the language and the architecture of corporate globalization. The concentration of communication industries around centers of global power reflects a broader transformation where governance increasingly occurs through interconnected networks of corporations, think tanks, lobby groups, financial institutions, and policy organizations operating beyond traditional democratic accountability. Public discourse is shaped through systems of influence designed to harmonize political decision-making with corporate priorities on a global scale. Miller and Dinan reveal that the global PR industry does not merely communicate capitalism; it actively constructs the ideological environment necessary for capitalism's continued expansion and legitimacy. The modern world is increasingly governed through symbolic

coordination where communication professionals manage crises, manufacture narratives, neutralize dissent, and sustain the perception that corporate globalization represents an inevitable and beneficial historical process. Yet beneath this system lies an ongoing tension between concentrated communication power and democratic accountability. The globalization of public relations reflects the globalization of corporate influence itself, producing a world where the struggle over public opinion becomes inseparable from the struggle over political sovereignty, economic justice, and democratic control.

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The Seduction of Consensus: Elite Networks and the Domestication of Dissent

In *A Century of Spin*, David Miller and William Dinan explore how elite networking organizations became subtle but highly effective instruments for reshaping democratic politics from within, focusing particularly on the transformation of the British Labour Party during the rise of neo-liberalism. The chapter “Pulling Labour’s Teeth” examines the British American Project as a symbolic example of how corporate power and transatlantic elite culture sought not merely to defeat political opposition openly but to absorb, socialize, and neutralize it gradually through psychological influence, professional networking, and ideological reorientation. The narrative opens with the recollections of Benjamin Zephaniah, whose experience at the Claremont Hotel in California exposes the strange emotional atmosphere surrounding elite networking culture. Zephaniah describes gatherings filled with oil executives, carefully managed social rituals, empowerment exercises, and staged intimacy disguised as openness and inclusivity. The experience felt profoundly artificial to him, a world detached from ordinary social reality and insulated within its own language of influence, self-management, and elite belonging. His discomfort eventually led him to flee the environment entirely and seek refuge among homeless people in Berkeley, a symbolic rejection of the seductive machinery of elite assimilation. Miller and Dinan use this episode to illustrate how projects such as the British American Project function less through direct coercion than through emotional incorporation into privileged networks of power. The BAP cultivated a carefully managed environment where future politicians, journalists, advisers, academics, and opinion-makers from Britain and the United States were invited into luxurious spaces designed to foster emotional loyalty, ideological moderation, and transatlantic consensus. Officially the project claimed to strengthen understanding between future leaders during times of international strain, yet beneath this language lay a more strategic objective: the cultivation of a political generation increasingly detached from confrontational democratic traditions and increasingly comfortable with corporate globalization, market liberalism, and elite managerial politics. The invitation-only nature of these gatherings intensified their symbolic power. Delegates selected for participation were subtly informed that they belonged to an emerging governing class whose role involved maintaining stability, consensus, and close relations between political and economic elites. Influence therefore operated psychologically through inclusion, prestige, intimacy, and socialization rather than explicit indoctrination. Miller and Dinan reveal that modern propaganda increasingly functions through networks of access and elite belonging rather than through crude public messaging alone. Public relations evolves beyond media manipulation into the management of political identity itself. Future leaders are not merely

persuaded intellectually but gradually integrated into environments where pro-business assumptions appear natural, sophisticated, and historically inevitable. The transformation of democratic politics thus occurs not only in public campaigns but in private spaces where elite culture shapes the emotional and ideological orientation of influential individuals long before they assume positions of public authority.

The British American Project became particularly significant because of its role in transforming sections of the Labour Party from a movement historically connected to labor, social democracy, and skepticism toward corporate power into a political formation increasingly aligned with market liberalism and transnational business interests. Miller and Dinan emphasize that the project did not operate in isolation but formed part of a broader network of think tanks, policy institutes, corporate advisory systems, and elite organizations dedicated to reconfiguring the ideological landscape of British politics during the late twentieth century. Figures such as Nick Butler played crucial roles in bridging the worlds of corporate strategy, policy planning, and Labour politics. Butler's trajectory—from Fabian Society involvement to senior positions at BP and participation in right-wing policy institutes—symbolized the growing convergence between corporate interests and sections of the political center-left. The British American Project provided an environment where future Labour ministers, media figures, advisers, and strategists interacted closely with business leaders, American political elites, and advocates of market-oriented reform. After the 1997 Labour victory, the project proudly highlighted how numerous participants and fellows had entered government positions, demonstrating the extent of its influence over the formation of New Labour's leadership culture. Figures associated with the BAP occupied significant ministerial and advisory roles while media personalities connected to the same networks shaped public political discourse simultaneously. Miller and Dinan argue that these elite networking structures functioned as mechanisms for gradually detaching Labour from its social democratic roots. Rather than confronting the party through open hostility alone, corporate-oriented networks cultivated a generation of politicians who increasingly internalized the assumption that business interests and progressive politics were fundamentally compatible. Trevor Phillips' admission that the BAP transformed his earlier belief that wealth creation conflicted with progressive politics illustrates the psychological impact of such elite socialization. The project did not simply communicate arguments intellectually; it immersed participants within environments where pro-business assumptions became emotionally normalized through personal relationships, status recognition, and transatlantic elite identity. Lord Lipsey's acknowledgment that the BAP formed one of several streams feeding into New Labour reveals how corporate influence often operates indirectly through overlapping networks rather than centralized conspiracies. The ideological transformation of Labour occurred gradually through cumulative exposure to institutions emphasizing modernization, pragmatism, competitiveness, and global economic integration. Miller and Dinan suggest that the political center-left increasingly adopted the language and priorities of neo-liberal capitalism not because of sudden betrayal alone but because elite networking systems successfully reshaped the horizons of political imagination. Corporate power no longer required the destruction of opposition parties if those parties could instead be domesticated psychologically and culturally. Public relations in this context extends beyond publicity into long-term elite conditioning, where future political leaders are trained to perceive corporate interests as synonymous with responsible governance and historical realism.

Beneath the discussion of the British American Project lies a broader philosophical argument about the changing nature of democratic power under global capitalism. Miller and Dinan demonstrate that modern corporate influence increasingly depends upon the production of elite consensus rather

than the mobilization of mass ideological enthusiasm alone. Earlier forms of propaganda relied heavily upon public campaigns directed toward large populations through newspapers, radio, advertising, and spectacle. By contrast, late twentieth-century neo-liberal power increasingly operated through elite integration, networking, policy coordination, and the strategic management of political classes. Organizations such as the British American Project functioned as social laboratories where future decision-makers absorbed the assumptions necessary for maintaining transatlantic corporate order. Democracy survives formally, yet the ideological range of acceptable political alternatives narrows substantially once competing parties share similar assumptions about markets, globalization, privatization, and corporate legitimacy. Miller and Dinan reveal that one of the greatest victories of neo-liberal propaganda was not convincing entire populations enthusiastically to support corporate power but persuading major political parties to abandon meaningful opposition to it. Political conflict increasingly became theatrical management within limits defined by elite economic consensus. The symbolic language of modernization, pragmatism, responsibility, and international partnership concealed a deeper restructuring of democratic politics where corporate priorities acquired institutional permanence regardless of electoral outcomes. Zephaniah's rejection of the elite networking environment therefore carries symbolic significance beyond personal discomfort. His refusal represents a rejection of the emotional and ideological seductions through which elite systems reproduce themselves. The luxury, intimacy, and apparent openness of projects like the BAP disguise their role in constructing networks of influence designed to harmonize political leadership with corporate globalization. Public relations here becomes inseparable from social engineering itself. The modern political elite is shaped not only through formal education or electoral competition but through carefully managed spaces of networking, prestige, and ideological cultivation. Miller and Dinan ultimately suggest that democratic accountability weakens when political leaders become integrated socially and psychologically into transnational elite cultures disconnected from the experiences and concerns of ordinary citizens. The struggle over democracy increasingly occurs not merely in elections or public debates but within invisible systems of elite socialization where future governing classes learn which ideas are acceptable, which alliances are rewarded, and which forms of dissent are gradually rendered obsolete. Corporate propaganda thus evolves into a sophisticated mechanism for manufacturing elite conformity while preserving the outward appearance of pluralistic democratic politics. The domestication of Labour symbolizes a broader historical transformation in which political opposition itself becomes absorbed into the structures of global corporate governance, leaving democracy increasingly hollowed from within while maintaining its symbolic forms intact.

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The Market Conversion of Labour: Power, Lobbying, and the Corporate State

In *A Century of Spin*, David Miller and William Dinan analyze the transformation of the British Labour Party under Tony Blair as one of the clearest examples of how corporate lobbying, public relations, and elite networking gradually reshaped a traditional social democratic movement into a political vehicle aligned increasingly with the interests of global capitalism. The process was not sudden or accidental but emerged through a carefully coordinated campaign involving ideological

persuasion, elite socialization, financial dependency, think tanks, lobbying networks, and public relations strategies designed to redefine the meaning of progressive politics itself. Peter Mandelson's infamous declaration that New Labour was "intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich" symbolized this ideological shift perfectly because it captured the party's growing comfort with corporate wealth and market liberalism after decades in which Labour had historically defined itself through suspicion toward concentrated economic power. Miller and Dinan describe the "prawn cocktail offensive" as the opening stage of this transformation. Labour leaders recognized after repeated electoral defeats that gaining the confidence of the City of London and corporate Britain had become essential for political survival within the new neo-liberal order established during the Thatcher years. The campaign involved far more than reassuring financial markets temporarily. It represented the systematic internalization of free-market ideology throughout sections of the Labour Party itself. Business elites and transatlantic corporate networks sought not merely to neutralize Labour electorally but to convert it culturally and psychologically into a party fundamentally compatible with corporate globalization. Elite networking projects such as the British American Project played a crucial role in this process by integrating ambitious young politicians, advisers, journalists, and intellectuals into environments where pro-business assumptions became normalized socially and emotionally. The future leadership of Labour was gradually acclimated to a worldview in which market forces were treated as natural, inevitable, and morally legitimate. Miller and Dinan suggest that desperation for electoral victory accelerated this ideological surrender. Figures such as Neal Lawson admitted openly that by the early 1990s Labour had become willing to abandon almost any traditional commitment if doing so increased the possibility of returning to power. This vulnerability allowed corporate influence to penetrate deeply into the party's institutional and intellectual culture. Winning over the City therefore became symbolic of a broader transformation in which democratic opposition to corporate power was softened, diluted, and eventually absorbed into a new political consensus. Labour's shift reflected the triumph of neo-liberal propaganda at the level of political identity itself. The party increasingly defined modernization, responsibility, and electability in terms consistent with market liberalism, while older traditions of labor militancy, public ownership, and class-based politics were reframed as outdated obstacles to progress. Public relations techniques became central to this transformation because they allowed political repositioning to occur through media management, elite networking, symbolic language, and image construction while maintaining the outward appearance of democratic renewal.

The integration of corporate influence into New Labour expanded rapidly through fundraising networks, lobbying relationships, and communication systems that blurred the distinction between political representation and private economic power. Miller and Dinan describe how figures such as Michael Levy became central intermediaries connecting the Labour leadership directly to wealthy donors and corporate interests. Levy's close personal relationship with Tony Blair symbolized the increasingly intimate overlap between political authority and business fundraising. Through private dinners, exclusive social gatherings, and carefully managed networking events, wealthy individuals gained privileged access to political leadership while Labour became increasingly dependent upon corporate financial support rather than traditional trade union funding. Organizations such as the Labour Finance and Industry Group and related donor clubs functioned as bridges linking the party to business elites eager to shape policy from within. Public relations firms and lobbyists became deeply embedded in this process. Julia Hobsbawm and Sarah Macaulay, through Hobsbawm Macaulay Communications, organized gala events and managed relationships between Labour politicians and corporate executives. These operations helped normalize the presence of corporate public relations culture inside the party itself. By the mid-

1990s major corporations including financial institutions, pharmaceutical companies, and multinational manufacturers openly aligned themselves with Labour, reflecting growing confidence that the party no longer posed a fundamental challenge to neo-liberal economic structures. Miller and Dinan emphasize that this transformation was accompanied by the rise of institutionalized lobbying practices and a culture of political access increasingly indistinguishable from corporate influence peddling. The cash-for-access scandal exposed how lobbyists with close ties to government advisers could offer privileged information and political access to private clients. Yet the scandal was treated publicly as the misconduct of isolated individuals rather than evidence of systemic corruption woven into the fabric of New Labour governance. Former Labour activists and advisers moved seamlessly into lobbying firms, while lobbyists themselves entered governmental positions. The boundary separating democratic representation from corporate consultancy eroded steadily. Labour MPs accepted corporate-funded trips, speaking fees, consultancy roles, and advisory positions, further integrating business interests into the political system. Miller and Dinan argue that the significance of these developments lies not merely in personal corruption but in the structural transformation of politics itself. Corporate lobbying became normalized as an ordinary component of governance. Political influence increasingly flowed through private networks, fundraising relationships, and communication consultancies operating largely beyond democratic transparency. Public relations firms did not simply manage public image externally; they participated actively in shaping policy agendas and political priorities internally. The Labour Party increasingly adopted the organizational logic of a modern corporate communications operation where electoral strategy, media management, donor relations, and ideological branding merged into a single system of political marketing. Democratic politics became inseparable from the techniques of lobbying and strategic communication developed originally within corporate public relations culture.

The ideological consolidation of New Labour was completed through the rise of think tanks, policy networks, and revolving-door relationships that created a permanent nexus connecting government, lobbying, media, and business elites. Miller and Dinan trace how institutions such as the Institute for Public Policy Research, the Social Market Foundation, Demos, the Foreign Policy Centre, and Peter Mandelson's Policy Network gradually reshaped the intellectual environment surrounding Labour politics. These organizations presented themselves as modernizing and reformist while subtly reorienting Labour discourse toward market-friendly assumptions. Corporate funding flowed increasingly into think tanks that reframed free-market economics, privatization, and globalization in progressive language. Publications associated with the intellectual left began translating traditional social democratic values into narratives compatible with neo-liberal capitalism. Influential thinkers and strategists including Geoff Mulgan and Stuart Hall contributed to this cultural realignment, helping construct the ideological foundations of New Labour's "Third Way" politics. Miller and Dinan argue that these think tanks functioned as indirect lobbying organizations where corporate influence could shape political ideas while avoiding the appearance of overt business control. The result was a party whose intellectual landscape became increasingly populated by concepts emphasizing competitiveness, modernization, flexibility, and partnership with business. Simultaneously, the revolving door between government and corporate consultancy accelerated dramatically. Ministers, advisers, lobbyists, and corporate executives circulated continuously between public office and private industry, creating overlapping networks of influence difficult to separate institutionally. Former ministers accepted consultancy positions with major corporations while lobbyists entered governmental roles carrying private-sector relationships and assumptions with them. Figures such as Peter Mandelson moved repeatedly between politics and public relations, embodying the collapse of boundaries between democratic

governance and corporate communication culture. Miller and Dinan present this revolving-door system as evidence of a broader transformation where political power itself becomes integrated into networks of corporate influence. Government no longer merely responds to lobbying pressure externally because lobbying interests are embedded directly within the governing apparatus. The distinction between public service and private profit becomes increasingly unstable. New Labour therefore represented more than an electoral rebranding exercise; it symbolized the successful absorption of a historically oppositional political movement into the structures of neo-liberal corporate governance. Public relations techniques played a central role in this transformation by managing perceptions, shaping ideological narratives, and constructing emotional legitimacy for policies favoring global capital. The Labour Party's traditional identity rooted in organized labor and democratic socialism was gradually dissolved into a political culture emphasizing market compatibility, corporate partnership, and media-managed centrism. Miller and Dinan ultimately reveal how corporate propaganda succeeded not simply by defeating political opposition outright but by transforming opposition itself into a vehicle compatible with the continuation of corporate power. Democracy survives formally through elections and public debate, yet the ideological range of acceptable politics narrows dramatically once major parties internalize the assumptions and priorities of global capitalism. The transformation of Labour into New Labour therefore reflects a deeper historical condition where public relations, lobbying, and elite networking reshape political consciousness from within while maintaining the outward rituals of democratic choice.

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The Managed Consensus: Cameron, Neo-Conservatism, and the Corporate Political Machine

In *A Century of Spin*, David Miller and William Dinan examine the rise of David Cameron and the neo-conservative transformation of British politics as evidence that the ideological differences between Labour and the Conservatives had gradually collapsed under the pressures of neo-liberal globalization and corporate influence. By the end of the Blair era, the traditional distinctions separating the two dominant political parties had become increasingly superficial, replaced by deeper alignments around transnational corporate power, Atlanticism, free-market ideology, and loyalty to American geopolitical dominance. The political landscape no longer revolved primarily around conflicts between socialism and conservatism but around competing factions within an elite consensus already committed to neo-liberal governance. Both Blair and Brown had accepted the central assumptions of this order, and Cameron's emergence represented less a break with New Labour than its mirror image operating under Conservative branding. Miller and Dinan challenge the widespread portrayal of Cameron as a moderate reformer attempting to modernize the Conservative Party and soften its harsh public image. Such portrayals, they argue, were themselves products of a sophisticated public relations campaign carefully orchestrated by media strategists, corporate advisers, and spin doctors determined to repackage conservatism for a post-Thatcher political environment. Cameron's carefully managed image as youthful, environmentally conscious, socially liberal, and approachable was not merely a spontaneous expression of personality but a constructed political product shaped through advanced communication

techniques developed within advertising, lobbying, and corporate branding culture. Central to this transformation was Steve Hilton, whose background in advertising and communications positioned him perfectly to engineer the Conservative Party's ideological rebranding. Hilton understood that modern politics increasingly depended upon symbolic presentation rather than ideological coherence. Campaigns emphasizing environmental imagery, social justice rhetoric, and emotional accessibility were designed to attract centrist and former Labour voters while preserving the underlying commitment to neo-liberal economics and corporate influence. Miller and Dinan reveal that these symbolic gestures—the new oak-tree logo, public cycling performances, carefully staged media appearances, and even dramatic visual events such as the Norwegian glacier trip—functioned as political theater intended to disguise continuity beneath the appearance of renewal. Public relations here becomes a mechanism not merely for promoting policies but for reconstructing political identity itself. Cameron's "compassionate conservatism" emerged as a media-managed narrative designed to make neo-liberal governance emotionally acceptable to an electorate increasingly disillusioned with traditional party politics. The apparent ideological flexibility of modern politicians therefore reflects the growing dominance of communication management over substantive democratic debate. Political leaders become brand identities shaped by consultants, pollsters, advertisers, and media strategists whose task is to align emotional perception with the interests of elite economic power. Miller and Dinan suggest that the collapse of clear ideological conflict between major parties represents one of the greatest achievements of modern corporate propaganda because it narrows political alternatives while preserving the illusion of democratic pluralism.

The integration of Cameron's Conservative Party into networks of lobbying, corporate consultancy, think tanks, and media influence demonstrates how contemporary political power increasingly operates through interconnected elite systems rather than isolated party structures. Cameron himself possessed deep roots within corporate communications before returning to frontline politics, having worked as a communications executive for Carlton Television. His professional experience reflected the growing convergence between media management and political leadership characterizing neo-liberal democracies. Around him emerged a circle of advisers, strategists, and politicians whose careers moved fluidly between journalism, lobbying, public relations, business consultancy, and government service. Figures such as Michael Gove, George Osborne, and Ed Vaizey exemplified this fusion of media culture, political ambition, and corporate networking. Their backgrounds in journalism, financial circles, lobbying firms, and communications consulting positioned them within a broader elite environment where political authority and corporate influence increasingly overlapped. Miller and Dinan emphasize that these relationships were not accidental but structural. The revolving door between government and the PR industry ensured that political decision-making remained deeply intertwined with the priorities of business elites. Cameron's supporters included powerful figures from communications conglomerates and corporate lobbying networks, including Peter Chadlington of Huntsworth and numerous advisers with extensive corporate directorships and financial interests. The boundaries separating public service from private profit became increasingly indistinct. Simultaneously, think tanks and policy organizations played a central role in shaping the ideological framework surrounding Cameron's rise. Groups such as the Henry Jackson Society, Policy Exchange, C-Change, Open Europe, Politeia, and the Stockholm Network formed interconnected nodes within a transnational neo-conservative and neo-liberal intellectual infrastructure. These organizations promoted free-market policies, Atlanticist foreign policy, military interventionism, deregulation, and minimal state interference while presenting such ideas as pragmatic necessities rather than ideological choices. The Henry Jackson Society, with its close associations to American neo-

conservative figures such as Robert Kagan and William Kristol, reflected the increasing alignment between British conservatism and the broader project of American-led global power. Think tanks functioned not merely as research institutions but as ideological factories producing narratives, policy proposals, media interventions, and networks of influence capable of shaping both public discourse and governmental priorities. Miller and Dinan show that the modern political class increasingly depends upon these organizations for intellectual legitimacy, policy development, and elite networking. Corporate lobbying therefore extends beyond direct financial pressure into the long-term cultivation of political culture itself. Through think tanks, media appearances, consultancy relationships, and communication strategies, corporate interests establish ideological environments where certain assumptions—market supremacy, privatization, deregulation, and Atlanticist geopolitics—become normalized across party lines. Cameron's modernization project thus represented less a rejection of Thatcherism than its adaptation to a media environment demanding softer rhetoric and more emotionally sophisticated branding techniques.

The convergence between New Labour and Cameronite conservatism reveals a deeper transformation in democratic politics where corporate power increasingly transcends formal party divisions and governs through elite consensus maintained by public relations, lobbying, and transnational policy networks. Miller and Dinan argue that by the early twenty-first century, British politics had entered a phase where elections altered personalities and rhetorical styles far more than underlying economic structures or geopolitical alignments. Neo-liberalism ceased to function merely as an economic doctrine and became instead the operating logic of political culture itself. Politicians from both major parties shared common networks, think tanks, lobby groups, media advisers, and corporate relationships. The same communications firms, policy institutes, donors, and strategic consultants circulated continuously through both Labour and Conservative circles, ensuring continuity regardless of electoral outcomes. Public relations firms and lobbying companies became permanent components of governance rather than external pressure groups. Figures such as Tim Allan and James Purnell embodied the revolving-door system through which advisers and ministers moved seamlessly between government and corporate communications consultancies. This circulation of personnel reinforced a governing culture where political authority increasingly served corporate interests while maintaining democratic appearances. Miller and Dinan emphasize that the power of these networks lies partly in their invisibility. Political decisions emerge not simply from parliamentary debate or public participation but from confidential meetings, advisory councils, donor relationships, and elite policy discussions occurring largely beyond democratic scrutiny. The language of modernization, responsibility, and pragmatism conceals the extent to which corporate priorities dominate political agendas. Cameron's carefully crafted image as a compassionate modernizer therefore reflects a broader historical phenomenon in which politics itself becomes increasingly mediated through branding strategies developed originally within commercial advertising culture. The citizen encounters politicians as media products whose emotional presentation matters more than ideological substance. Democracy becomes a competition between communication systems rather than genuine alternatives for organizing economic and social life. Miller and Dinan ultimately reveal that the triumph of neo-conservative and neo-liberal politics depended not only upon economic restructuring but upon the construction of a transnational apparatus of influence linking corporations, think tanks, PR firms, lobbyists, media institutions, and political elites into a unified system of ideological management. Within this environment, public relations no longer merely shapes public perception after decisions are made; it actively structures the political reality within which decisions become imaginable. Cameron's rise symbolizes the maturation of this system, where party differences become aesthetic variations within a broader corporate consensus.

committed to preserving the dominance of global capital while presenting politics as dynamic, competitive, and democratically responsive. Beneath the surface of electoral theater, however, the same elite networks continue shaping policy, controlling access, and defining the acceptable limits of political discourse. The convergence of Labour and Conservative neo-liberalism therefore reflects not democratic evolution but the gradual absorption of political life into the strategic logic of corporate communication and transnational elite power.

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The Machinery of Desire: Advertising, Addiction, and the Colonization of Consciousness

In “Merchants of Discontent,” Tamara R. Piety explores the disturbing psychological foundations of modern advertising and argues that commercial persuasion increasingly resembles systems of emotional dependency and addiction rather than the neutral transmission of information celebrated by defenders of commercial speech. Her analysis begins with the haunting vision articulated by Aldous Huxley in the early twentieth century, where future societies would no longer rely primarily upon visible coercion or overt dictatorship but upon psychological manipulation so deeply internalized that individuals would willingly participate in their own domination. Huxley feared the emergence of a civilization governed through “commercial propaganda,” a condition in which endless advertising campaigns would shape desires, identities, and social aspirations more effectively than traditional political force ever could. Piety suggests that contemporary consumer society increasingly reflects this dystopian prediction. Modern advertising no longer merely informs citizens about products; it manufactures emotional needs, constructs symbolic fantasies, and organizes personal dissatisfaction into endless cycles of consumption. The distinction between information and manipulation gradually collapses under the weight of continuous commercial messaging saturating everyday life. Individuals encounter thousands of advertisements daily across television, digital media, public spaces, entertainment, and social networks, creating an environment where consciousness itself becomes a contested terrain shaped increasingly by corporate psychological influence. Advertising functions by attaching emotional meaning to commodities, promising fulfillment, status, intimacy, confidence, beauty, freedom, or belonging through acts of consumption. Yet these promises can never truly be satisfied because the economic logic of consumer capitalism depends upon the perpetual reproduction of desire. Satisfaction would threaten the system itself. Piety therefore compares advertising to addiction, arguing that both operate through mechanisms of longing, temporary gratification, and repeated dissatisfaction. Just as addictive substances stimulate cycles of craving that can never permanently resolve emotional emptiness, commercial advertising cultivates insatiable desires designed to reproduce continuous consumption. Individuals become trapped within systems encouraging them to seek emotional completion through commodities while ensuring that such completion always remains unreachable. The psychological consequences extend far beyond ordinary consumer behavior. Advertising reshapes social values, intensifies materialism, contributes to body anxiety and objectification, and encourages the treatment of human identity itself as a marketable performance. Children become particularly vulnerable because they lack the cognitive defenses necessary to distinguish manipulation from genuine emotional meaning. Women are frequently targeted

through advertising systems exploiting insecurities surrounding beauty, sexuality, and social worth. Meanwhile industries producing addictive or harmful products such as tobacco and alcohol employ highly sophisticated emotional appeals to normalize destructive consumption patterns. Piety's analysis reveals that advertising operates not at the level of rational information exchange but at the level of unconscious desire, symbolic fantasy, and emotional vulnerability. The modern consumer is therefore not simply a rational decision-maker navigating objective information but a psychologically managed subject whose desires are continuously engineered through commercial persuasion.

The legal doctrine surrounding commercial speech becomes deeply problematic once the psychological realities of advertising are acknowledged fully. Piety examines how First Amendment protections for advertising emerged historically from the assumption that commercial communication primarily provides useful information enabling rational consumer choice. Early legal distinctions treated commercial speech as less deserving of constitutional protection because it was considered fundamentally economic rather than political. However, beginning during the 1970s, the United States Supreme Court gradually extended constitutional protections to advertising under the belief that consumers benefit when markets circulate accurate information about products and services. Decisions such as *Virginia State Board of Pharmacy v. Virginia Citizens Council* reflected a liberal ideal of the rational consumer who evaluates information objectively and makes autonomous decisions within a competitive marketplace of ideas. Yet Piety argues that this legal framework rests upon profoundly unrealistic assumptions about human psychology. Contemporary research in psychology, behavioral science, neuroscience, and advertising studies increasingly demonstrates that individuals rarely behave as fully rational actors capable of separating emotional influence from factual information. Advertising succeeds precisely because it bypasses rational evaluation and appeals instead to subconscious drives, social anxieties, emotional associations, fantasies of belonging, and symbolic desires. Commercial persuasion functions not through logical argument alone but through carefully engineered emotional environments designed to shape perception unconsciously. The legal doctrine protecting commercial speech therefore misunderstands the actual mechanisms through which advertising operates. The contradiction becomes especially visible through the concept of "puffing," where exaggerated advertising claims are legally dismissed as harmless promotional exaggerations that no reasonable consumer would believe literally. Yet advertisers continue employing such techniques because they understand that emotional suggestion remains psychologically effective regardless of factual accuracy. The law simultaneously acknowledges that advertising manipulates consumers emotionally while pretending that rational individuals remain immune to such influence. This contradiction exposes the deeper ideological function of commercial speech doctrine within capitalist society. By treating advertising primarily as informational communication, legal systems obscure the extent to which modern markets depend upon emotional engineering and psychological management. Piety demonstrates that advertising increasingly resembles propaganda in its capacity to shape desires, normalize social values, and influence behavior beyond conscious rational control. The idealized image of the autonomous consumer becomes difficult to sustain once the pervasive emotional architecture of advertising culture is recognized. Commercial speech protections thus reflect not merely constitutional commitments to free expression but broader cultural assumptions about individual autonomy and market rationality that may no longer correspond to psychological reality. The marketplace of ideas becomes inseparable from the marketplace of commodities, where persuasion techniques originally developed for commercial purposes gradually reshape politics, culture, and identity formation.

itself. Advertising no longer occupies the margins of social life but becomes one of the dominant symbolic systems organizing consciousness within advanced consumer capitalism.

Piety's comparison between advertising and addiction ultimately raises profound philosophical questions about freedom, autonomy, and democracy within commercial society. Addiction involves the repeated pursuit of satisfaction through behaviors or substances that temporarily relieve psychological discomfort while simultaneously deepening long-term dependency. Advertising functions similarly by continually stimulating dissatisfaction and presenting commodities as solutions to emotional needs that cannot genuinely be resolved through consumption alone. Consumer capitalism therefore depends upon maintaining populations psychologically oriented toward perpetual longing. Citizens become consumers whose identities revolve increasingly around acquisition, lifestyle branding, and symbolic self-construction through commodities. The emotional structure of advertising ensures that desire constantly renews itself, preventing stable satisfaction while sustaining economic growth through continuous consumption. Piety suggests that this condition produces broader social harms extending beyond individual purchasing behavior. Materialism intensifies as personal worth becomes linked increasingly to possessions and status symbols. Women's bodies become commercialized objects within systems exploiting insecurity and sexualization. Harmful products gain legitimacy through emotionally sophisticated campaigns disguising addiction beneath fantasies of freedom, pleasure, or sophistication. Most importantly, the continuous colonization of attention and desire weakens the foundations of democratic citizenship itself. Democracy presupposes individuals capable of reflective judgment, critical reasoning, and meaningful autonomy. Yet advertising culture systematically encourages impulsive emotional reaction, passive consumption, and psychological dependency. The citizen increasingly becomes a target for behavioral manipulation rather than an active participant in public life. Huxley's fear of a society governed through commercial propaganda therefore acquires renewed significance within contemporary media culture. Modern power rarely operates through direct repression alone; it functions through the management of desire itself. Individuals willingly embrace systems that shape their identities and aspirations because those systems promise emotional fulfillment while simultaneously reproducing dissatisfaction. Piety's analysis reveals that the crisis of commercial speech is ultimately a crisis of democratic subjectivity. If advertising systematically undermines rational autonomy while masquerading as neutral information, then legal doctrines protecting commercial persuasion without acknowledging its psychological effects become increasingly untenable. The commercial sphere cannot be separated cleanly from the political sphere because advertising shapes the emotional habits, symbolic frameworks, and patterns of attention through which citizens interpret reality itself. Public discourse becomes saturated with techniques designed originally to sell commodities but now extended into politics, media, and culture broadly. The logic of addiction merges with the logic of consumer capitalism, producing societies where emotional vulnerability becomes a profitable resource continuously exploited by industries specializing in desire production. Piety ultimately calls for a reconsideration of the assumptions underlying commercial speech protections and a deeper recognition that freedom requires more than unrestricted markets for persuasion. Genuine autonomy may demand protections against systems designed systematically to manipulate unconscious desire and transform human dissatisfaction into permanent economic dependency. The modern advertising system thus emerges not merely as an economic mechanism but as a psychological regime shaping the very conditions of consciousness within contemporary society.

Piety, T.R. (1999) 'Merchants of Discontent: An Exploration of the Psychology of Advertising, Addiction, and the Implications for Commercial Speech', *Seattle University Law Review*, 25(2), pp. 377–420;

Huxley, A. (1932) *Brave New World*. London: Chatto & Windus;

Packard, V. (1957) *The Hidden Persuaders*. New York: David McKay Company.

The Captive Mind of Consumption: Autonomy, Rationality, and the Illusion of Freedom

In “Merchants of Discontent,” Tamara R. Piety investigates the fragile philosophical foundations underlying modern theories of commercial speech and reveals how assumptions about autonomy and rationality collapse once confronted with the psychological realities of advertising and human behavior. At the center of this exploration lies a fundamental fear: the fear of losing reason, which is ultimately a fear of losing control over oneself. Modern democratic theory, constitutional law, and free speech doctrine often assume that individuals are autonomous beings capable of rational judgment, able to evaluate information objectively and make decisions free from manipulation. Yet Piety argues that these assumptions increasingly conflict with empirical evidence concerning human psychology, emotional vulnerability, and cognitive bias. Before addressing advertising specifically, she first dismantles a common misconception regarding the First Amendment itself. Commercial speech is not protected merely because it consists of communication. Supreme Court jurisprudence has consistently recognized that not all forms of speech qualify for constitutional protection. Contracts, bribery, fraud, and numerous other speech acts remain outside protected expression despite involving language and communication. At the same time, artistic forms such as painting or music are protected even though they do not resemble ordinary speech directly. These contradictions force legal theorists to define First Amendment protection not by the existence of language alone but by deeper theories regarding what democracy seeks to preserve. Some theorists, such as Robert Bork, emphasize political speech and democratic participation as the core values protected by the First Amendment, while others focus on truth-seeking, dissent, liberty, or personal autonomy. Piety concentrates particularly on autonomy because commercial speech doctrine repeatedly justifies the protection of advertising through the assumption that autonomous individuals benefit from access to information allowing them to make rational choices in the marketplace. Yet autonomy itself proves deeply unstable as a concept. Philosophers and legal theorists often confuse autonomy with freedom or liberty without defining clearly what these terms actually mean. Is autonomy merely freedom from external government interference, or does it involve the deeper capacity for rational self-governance? The distinction between negative liberty and positive liberty complicates the issue further. Negative liberty emphasizes freedom from coercion, while positive liberty concerns the individual’s ability to shape actions rationally according to self-directed purposes. Professor Fallon’s distinction between descriptive autonomy and ascriptive autonomy introduces another dimension. Descriptive autonomy refers empirically to the degree of actual self-control individuals possess, while ascriptive autonomy concerns the moral or legal right to make choices regardless of whether those choices are rational or self-destructive. Piety demonstrates that commercial speech doctrine often relies implicitly upon ascriptive autonomy while ignoring evidence undermining descriptive autonomy. Individuals are treated legally as rational, independent decision-makers even when empirical psychology reveals how vulnerable they remain to emotional influence, cognitive distortion, and manipulative

persuasion. Modern advertising exploits precisely these vulnerabilities, transforming the ideal of autonomous citizenship into a fiction increasingly detached from psychological reality.

The crisis deepens further once rationality itself becomes subject to scrutiny. Piety observes that rationality, like autonomy, remains notoriously difficult to define despite serving as one of the foundational assumptions of liberal democratic theory. Western philosophy traditionally elevated reason above passion, imagining the rational individual as someone capable of evaluating evidence objectively, suppressing emotional impulses, and acting according to logical judgment. This Enlightenment image of human beings as fundamentally rational actors became central not only to constitutional thought but also to economic theory, market ideology, and modern conceptions of personal freedom. Commercial speech doctrine depends heavily upon this idealized vision because it assumes that consumers process advertising information rationally, compare alternatives objectively, and make decisions according to informed self-interest. Yet behavioral psychology and cognitive science increasingly reveal that human judgment rarely functions according to such ideals. Individuals are deeply influenced by unconscious biases, emotional framing, social pressures, symbolic associations, and psychological heuristics that operate beneath conscious awareness. Confirmation bias, motivated reasoning, and illusions of control persist even when individuals recognize their existence intellectually. Education alone often fails to eliminate these distortions because they are embedded deeply within cognitive processes themselves. Piety therefore argues that commercial speech protections rest upon a profoundly unrealistic understanding of human psychology. Advertising does not primarily communicate objective information designed to support rational evaluation. Instead, it operates by stimulating emotional responses and associating products with fantasies of fulfillment, status, attractiveness, power, belonging, or escape. Rational analysis becomes secondary to symbolic manipulation. Brands function less as practical commodities than as emotional signifiers embedded within identity formation and social aspiration. The contradiction within commercial speech doctrine becomes especially visible through the legal treatment of “puffing,” where exaggerated advertising claims are dismissed as harmless because no reasonable consumer is expected to believe them literally. Yet advertisers continue relying upon puffery precisely because emotional suggestion remains psychologically effective even without factual credibility. Commercial persuasion functions not through logical argument alone but through emotional atmosphere, repetition, imagery, and symbolic desire. Consumers may intellectually recognize exaggeration while remaining emotionally influenced by it nonetheless. Piety reveals that advertising systematically bypasses rational deliberation by exploiting vulnerabilities rooted within human cognition itself. The fantasy worlds created by advertising encourage individuals to seek emotional satisfaction through consumption while disguising the impossibility of such fulfillment. Material goods become invested with promises of happiness, intimacy, control, youth, beauty, or self-realization. Yet these promises remain perpetually unattainable because consumer capitalism depends upon endless dissatisfaction. Desire must continuously renew itself to sustain economic expansion. Rational autonomy therefore becomes increasingly compromised as individuals internalize identities structured around consumption patterns rather than reflective self-governance. Advertising culture transforms citizens into consumers whose emotional lives are organized through corporate symbolic systems designed to manipulate insecurity, aspiration, and longing.

Piety’s examination of advertising ultimately exposes a profound contradiction within liberal democratic society itself: a political culture claiming to protect individual autonomy while permitting economic systems built upon the systematic manipulation of unconscious desire. Advertising frequently exploits the human longing for control by suggesting that commodities can

resolve emotional insecurities or existential dissatisfaction. Products are linked symbolically to fantasies of success, attractiveness, belonging, sexual fulfillment, social recognition, or psychological escape. These fantasies create the illusion that personal transformation lies only one purchase away. Yet the satisfaction promised by advertising remains fundamentally elusive because the commercial system depends upon perpetual craving rather than fulfillment. Consumers are encouraged continually to pursue identities through commodities while remaining psychologically dependent upon future consumption for emotional completion. Piety compares this cycle explicitly to addiction. Just as addictive substances offer temporary relief while deepening long-term dependency, advertising stimulates endless desire while preventing lasting satisfaction. Individuals become trapped within patterns of consumption promising autonomy and self-realization while actually intensifying emotional dependency upon external symbolic systems. The consequences extend beyond individual psychology into broader cultural and political life. Materialism expands as personal worth becomes tied increasingly to market identity. Emotional dissatisfaction becomes commercialized and monetized systematically. Advertising contributes to body anxiety, objectification, unhealthy social comparison, and the normalization of harmful products such as tobacco and alcohol through emotionally sophisticated campaigns. Most significantly, advertising undermines the conditions necessary for genuine democratic citizenship. Democracy assumes individuals capable of critical reflection, rational deliberation, and meaningful self-governance. Yet commercial culture increasingly conditions individuals to respond emotionally, impulsively, and symbolically rather than critically. Piety therefore challenges the assumption that unrestricted commercial speech necessarily enhances freedom. If advertising systematically manipulates emotional vulnerabilities while bypassing rational judgment, then protecting it uncritically under the banner of autonomy becomes paradoxical. The law treats consumers as sovereign rational agents precisely within environments engineered to weaken rational autonomy continuously. Commercial speech doctrine thereby reflects not empirical reality but ideological commitment to market liberalism and individualism. The autonomous consumer celebrated by constitutional theory resembles an abstraction increasingly disconnected from the psychological conditions of contemporary life. Advertising culture colonizes attention, shapes desire, and structures identity so extensively that freedom itself risks becoming redefined according to the logic of consumption. Individuals remain formally free while emotionally managed through systems of persuasion operating constantly beneath conscious awareness. Piety ultimately suggests that preserving meaningful autonomy may require recognizing the limits of rational self-control and reconsidering the social power granted to commercial persuasion within modern democracies. The crisis of commercial speech is therefore not merely legal but civilizational. It concerns whether societies organized around perpetual advertising can sustain genuinely autonomous citizens at all, or whether democratic subjectivity itself gradually dissolves beneath the endless psychological management of desire.

Piety, T.R. (1999) 'Merchants of Discontent: An Exploration of the Psychology of Advertising, Addiction, and the Implications for Commercial Speech', Seattle University Law Review, 25(2), pp. 377–420;

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The Addicted Consumer: Advertising, Escapism, and the Architecture of Dependency

In “Merchants of Discontent,” Tamara R. Piety develops one of her most provocative arguments by exploring the deep psychological parallels between addiction and modern advertising, revealing how commercial culture increasingly operates through mechanisms of emotional dependency, escapism, denial, and compulsive desire. The comparison begins with addiction itself, a phenomenon whose definition remains highly contested despite decades of medical, psychological, and philosophical debate. Traditional medical models, influenced heavily by figures such as Dr. Elvin Jellinek, frame alcoholism and addiction as progressive diseases resembling chronic illnesses like diabetes. According to this model, addiction results from a combination of biological, genetic, psychological, and social factors that gradually overwhelm the individual’s capacity for control. Dr. George Vaillant similarly emphasizes the complexity of addiction, arguing that no single explanation fully captures its origins. Yet critics of the disease model such as Stanton Peele and Herbert Fingarette warn that reducing addiction entirely to biology risks stripping individuals of agency and reinforcing the belief that human beings are powerless before their compulsions. Piety does not attempt to resolve this dispute completely but instead uses it to illuminate broader questions concerning autonomy, self-control, and vulnerability within consumer society. Addiction proves difficult even to measure accurately because addictive behaviors extend beyond drugs and alcohol into gambling, shopping, internet dependency, compulsive eating, and numerous other forms of compulsive behavior. Self-reporting remains unreliable because addiction itself frequently involves secrecy, denial, and deception. This complexity becomes significant because Piety suggests that advertising culture operates through psychological mechanisms closely resembling those underlying addiction. The internal experience of addiction often involves emotional bonding with substances or behaviors that come to function symbolically as companions, protectors, or sources of comfort. Addicts describe alcohol, drugs, gambling, or compulsive habits not merely as objects of use but as relationships replacing authentic human connection. Carolyn Knapp’s description of alcohol as a “lover” captures the emotional structure of addiction perfectly: the substance promises intimacy, relief, and emotional completion while simultaneously deepening isolation and dependency. Piety argues that advertising manipulates similar emotional vulnerabilities by presenting commodities as symbolic solutions to existential dissatisfaction. Products are no longer sold simply for practical utility but as emotional companions capable of delivering confidence, belonging, attractiveness, security, or escape. Commercial culture transforms ordinary consumption into an emotional relationship where brands promise forms of fulfillment traditionally associated with community, identity, love, or spiritual meaning. The consumer increasingly resembles the addict, seeking emotional regulation through external commodities while becoming psychologically dependent upon systems of manufactured desire. Advertising thereby cultivates not rational choice but emotional attachment, constructing identities organized around perpetual longing and symbolic consumption.

The psychological dynamics connecting addiction and advertising become especially visible through the themes of escapism, fantasy, magical thinking, and denial. Addiction often begins by offering temporary relief from anxiety, loneliness, shame, boredom, or emotional pain. Substances and compulsive behaviors create moments of escape where reality appears suspended and suffering temporarily softened. Yet this relief proves transient, requiring repeated consumption while gradually intensifying emotional dependency. Piety argues that modern advertising functions through remarkably similar mechanisms. Commercial messages rarely focus merely upon factual product information; instead they construct fantasies promising escape from dissatisfaction, insecurity, or social failure. Advertisements sell symbolic visions of transformed existence where beauty products promise confidence, luxury goods promise status, alcohol

promises intimacy, and consumer technology promises mastery or belonging. Material consumption becomes associated with fantasies of emotional rebirth and personal reinvention. Yet like addiction itself, these promises remain fundamentally deceptive because no commodity can resolve the deeper existential anxieties exploited by advertising culture. Consumers therefore remain trapped within cycles of pursuit and disappointment, constantly searching for fulfillment through new purchases that never satisfy permanently. Piety emphasizes that denial and deception play crucial roles in both addiction and advertising systems. Addicts frequently lie to others and to themselves in order to preserve the illusion that their behavior remains under control. This denial protects the addiction from confrontation while deepening emotional dependency. Advertising culture similarly depends upon forms of symbolic deception. Commercial campaigns conceal harmful consequences, exaggerate benefits, and obscure the emptiness of the fulfillment they promise. Harmful industries such as tobacco and alcohol have historically relied upon sophisticated emotional advertising designed to normalize dependency while hiding long-term damage. The deception extends beyond specific products into the broader ideology of consumerism itself. Advertising persuades individuals that emotional suffering, loneliness, or dissatisfaction can be solved through consumption while concealing the structural impossibility of such solutions. Piety further explores how addiction and advertising both intensify isolation. Addicts increasingly withdraw from authentic relationships, preferring the controlled emotional environment offered by substances or compulsive habits. Similarly, advertising promotes radical individualism where personal problems become framed as private deficiencies solvable through market choices rather than collective relationships or social transformation. Consumers are encouraged to define themselves through possessions, lifestyles, and personal branding rather than communal identity or meaningful social bonds. Consumption replaces connection. The emotional logic of advertising therefore deepens alienation while simultaneously presenting commodities as remedies for the loneliness it helps produce. This process reflects a broader transformation within consumer capitalism where emotional life itself becomes colonized by commercial symbolism. Individuals seek comfort, identity, and self-worth through market relationships that cannot genuinely reciprocate emotional needs. The result resembles addiction precisely because the consumer remains emotionally attached to systems generating the dissatisfaction they claim to resolve.

Piety ultimately presents advertising not simply as a commercial practice but as a psychological regime shaping modern consciousness through cycles of dependency, emotional manipulation, and symbolic control. Addiction in its later stages frequently produces emotional numbness, where the individual no longer seeks pleasure so much as relief from pain, emptiness, or despair. The addict becomes detached from authentic emotional experience, using substances primarily to avoid confronting suffering directly. Piety argues that advertising culture produces a comparable numbing effect. Constant exposure to commercial messaging conditions individuals to seek immediate emotional gratification through consumption while discouraging deeper reflection upon the sources of dissatisfaction itself. Material acquisition offers temporary distraction rather than meaningful fulfillment. Critical thought weakens as emotional energy becomes redirected continually toward fantasies of consumption and self-reinvention. Advertising culture therefore undermines autonomy not only by manipulating desires but by reshaping the emotional structure through which individuals interpret reality. Consumers become habituated to seeking solutions externally through products rather than internally through reflection, relationships, or collective engagement. The similarities between addiction and advertising reveal how deeply modern capitalism depends upon psychological vulnerability. Insecurity, loneliness, anxiety, and dissatisfaction become economically valuable because they generate endless consumer demand.

Advertising industries systematically exploit these vulnerabilities, normalizing instant gratification while presenting emotional dependency as freedom and self-expression. Piety's analysis challenges the optimistic assumptions underlying commercial speech protections and liberal market ideology. If advertising operates through mechanisms closely resembling addiction, then the claim that consumers engage with commercial speech rationally becomes increasingly untenable. The marketplace no longer resembles an arena of informed autonomous choice but a psychological environment engineered to stimulate compulsion, insecurity, and perpetual dissatisfaction. The social consequences extend far beyond individual purchasing decisions. Consumer culture encourages passivity, emotional isolation, and symbolic conformity while weakening capacities for critical judgment and democratic participation. Citizens increasingly inhabit a world where emotional experience itself becomes structured through commercial fantasy. Piety therefore suggests that unrestricted commercial speech may produce harms comparable in some respects to addictive substances themselves. Both addiction and advertising involve systems promising emotional fulfillment while deepening dependency and undermining autonomy. The consumer becomes psychologically conditioned to seek identity and relief through external commodities that can never truly satisfy the needs they exploit. The modern advertising system thus emerges as a form of emotional governance operating through seduction rather than coercion, shaping not only consumer behavior but the emotional architecture of contemporary society itself. Within this environment, freedom becomes difficult to distinguish from dependency because desire itself has been colonized by commercial power. The addicted consumer continues purchasing not because fulfillment has been achieved but because the system requires perpetual dissatisfaction in order to survive.

Piety, T.R. (1999) 'Merchants of Discontent: An Exploration of the Psychology of Advertising, Addiction, and the Implications for Commercial Speech', Seattle University Law Review, 25(2), pp. 377–420;

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The Promotional Democracy: Public Relations and the Managed Public Sphere

In *Rethinking Public Relations: PR Propaganda and Democracy*, Kevin Moloney traces the transformation of public relations from a relatively marginal activity at the beginning of the twentieth century into one of the defining communicative structures of modern liberal democracies. The origins of contemporary PR can be located in the United States around 1900 and in Britain during the 1920s, when industrial capitalism, mass democracy, and expanding media systems created the conditions for systematic persuasion on a national scale. Although the tools of communication have evolved technologically, Moloney suggests that the essential logic of public relations has remained remarkably stable. If one could travel through time, the professional PR strategist of the early twentieth century would still recognize the objectives pursued by modern communication consultants: the management of perception, the shaping of narratives, the protection of institutional legitimacy, and the continuous effort to influence collective understanding. By the late twentieth century, public relations had become so integrated into British political and economic life that some scholars referred to it as the “fifth estate,” positioning it alongside the press and traditional institutions of power. PR practitioners played visible roles in the neoliberal transformations of the 1980s, participating directly in the restructuring of politics, markets, and public consciousness. Moloney argues that this integration is not temporary but

characteristic of modern democratic society itself. Public relations has become inseparable from liberal market democracies because these systems depend upon constant communication between competing interests, organizations, and institutions. Contemporary society therefore exists within what can be described as a permanent promotional environment. Citizens do not merely encounter occasional persuasion; they inhabit a world saturated by strategic messaging, media management, image construction, and symbolic competition. PR is no longer confined to corporate boardrooms or political campaigns but permeates all areas of social life, from celebrity culture and activism to government policy and personal identity. The modern citizen moves through an environment where communication increasingly functions as competition for visibility, credibility, and emotional influence. In such conditions, public relations becomes not simply an industry but a governing logic of democratic culture itself.

Moloney develops this argument further through his discussion of civic and commercial pluralism. Liberal democracies present themselves as open systems where diverse interests compete freely within the public sphere. PR functions as one of the primary instruments through which these interests communicate, defend themselves, and attempt to shape public opinion. In this sense, public relations reflects the pluralistic structure of democratic society because every group, institution, corporation, charity, movement, or political organization seeks representation within the crowded arena of public discourse. Modern society has therefore become what Ewen called a “PR-saturated” culture, where strategic communication surrounds individuals continuously. Moore’s description of PR as “walls of sound” captures the overwhelming density of competing promotional messages struggling for attention within the modern information environment. Michie similarly observed that organizations increasingly believe visibility itself is necessary for existence. To disappear from public awareness is to lose relevance, legitimacy, and influence. Consequently, PR becomes indispensable not only for corporations but also for charities, protest movements, public institutions, celebrities, and private individuals. This condition produces a paradox frequently overlooked by critics. Public relations is often dismissed as trivial self-promotion while simultaneously condemned as dangerously manipulative and politically powerful. Moloney notes that these criticisms contradict one another because something genuinely trivial could not exercise the immense social influence attributed to PR. Public relations instead functions as an instrumental activity embedded within deeper social and economic structures. It reflects the competitive dynamics of liberal democracies, where organizations and individuals struggle to secure favorable outcomes through communication and persuasion. Moloney distinguishes between civic pluralism and commercial pluralism in order to explain how this process operates. Civic pluralism emerges from the multiplication of voluntary associations, activist groups, and citizen movements seeking representation within democratic debate. Commercial pluralism, by contrast, reflects the growing dominance of market logic and business interests within public policy and economic life since the 1970s. As neoliberal ideas emphasizing privatization, deregulation, and individual autonomy gained prominence, business interests increasingly shaped the public sphere itself. PR became the principal mechanism through which corporations, trade associations, and economic elites communicated their agendas and defended their influence. Yet Moloney also observes that PR techniques remain available to countervailing forces such as protest groups, environmental campaigns, and non-governmental organizations. Public relations therefore reflects the broader democratic struggle among competing interests rather than belonging exclusively to corporate power. The public sphere becomes a promotional battlefield where all actors attempt to secure legitimacy, visibility, and influence through strategic communication.

The rise of neoliberalism intensified this promotional culture by normalizing self-interested communication as a dominant social principle. Public relations flourished because neoliberal ideology encouraged individuals, businesses, and institutions to behave entrepreneurially, treating communication itself as a competitive resource. Promotional culture expanded far beyond commercial advertising into politics, education, healthcare, activism, and personal identity formation. Society increasingly accepted the assumption that every actor must actively market itself in order to survive within competitive environments. Public relations became a flexible technology of self-advancement adaptable to virtually every sphere of social life. According to Moloney, most messages circulating within modern democracies are now self-interested to some degree, designed to secure advantage, legitimacy, funding, influence, or public sympathy. Yet he resists purely cynical interpretations of this condition. Although PR communication often advances particular interests, truth and credibility are not necessarily destroyed completely because democratic competition subjects messages to continuous challenge and scrutiny. Competing organizations, journalists, activists, and publics contest one another's claims within the communicative arena, creating a process through which stronger arguments may eventually emerge. PR therefore operates within a dynamic relationship between persuasion and democratic debate. This tension becomes especially visible in the practice of issues management, which Moloney identifies as a central feature of contemporary public relations. Emerging in the United States during the 1970s, issues management developed in response to growing pressure from environmental movements, consumer activism, and regulatory institutions. Organizations realized that survival increasingly depended upon anticipating controversies, monitoring public attitudes, and responding strategically to emerging social concerns. PR evolved beyond simple publicity into a sophisticated managerial practice involving environmental scanning, strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and internal organizational adaptation. Issues management reflects the institutionalization of communication as a permanent feature of governance and organizational survival. Public relations professionals no longer merely distribute messages; they help shape policy responses, manage crises, and coordinate institutional behavior in anticipation of public reaction. Moloney presents this development as evidence that PR has become an integral communicative force within democratic societies. Critics frequently accuse public relations of manufacturing consent for powerful interests, yet its effectiveness depends upon continuous interaction with competing messages and opposing voices. Modern democracies therefore operate through a permanent communicative struggle where legitimacy, authority, and public understanding are negotiated through strategic persuasion. PR emerges not as an accidental distortion of democracy but as one of its defining operational mechanisms within highly mediated societies. The promotional democracy of the twenty-first century is thus characterized by endless symbolic competition in which corporations, governments, activists, and individuals all struggle to shape the narratives through which reality itself becomes publicly understood.

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The Manufactured Consensus: Public Relations and the Propaganda Logic of Democracy

In *Rethinking Public Relations: PR Propaganda and Democracy*, Kevin Moloney advances one of the most controversial arguments in the study of modern communication by insisting that public relations is fundamentally a weak form of propaganda operating within liberal capitalist democracies. Building upon earlier discussions concerning pluralism and promotional culture, Moloney argues that truth within PR-saturated societies is not inherent in communication itself but emerges only through external scrutiny by competing voices, critics, journalists, and audiences. This realization raises profound questions regarding the ethical and political nature of PR communication. According to Moloney, the overwhelming evidence from American academic literature demonstrates that public relations has historically functioned less as open dialogue and more as strategic persuasion designed to secure compliance for powerful political and economic interests. PR messages do not simply “say” something neutrally; they are constructed to “tell” audiences how to interpret events, organizations, products, and social realities. The modern PR voice is therefore inherently directive, emotional, and manipulative. Its purpose is rarely mutual understanding in the ideal democratic sense but rather the management of opinion and the shaping of public attitudes favorable to elites. Throughout the twentieth century, public relations became especially associated with large corporations defending their economic privileges and governments seeking to stabilize authority or implement social engineering programs. PR campaigns manipulated public perception by hiding the true origins of messages, embedding persuasive content within supposedly independent media, reducing factual complexity while maximizing emotional appeal, and relying primarily upon one-way communication flows rather than genuine public dialogue. Such characteristics explain why public distrust of PR remains widespread. Citizens often perceive public relations not as transparent communication but as concealed influence operating behind institutional facades. Moloney’s argument aligns with neo-pluralist thinkers such as Dahl, Lindblom, Useem, and Vogel, who maintained that business interests constitute the most powerful force confronting democratic governments in Western societies. PR became one of the principal instruments through which these interests maintained ideological dominance. Through mass media campaigns and private lobbying alike, corporations sought to shape not only public policy but the very climate of public opinion itself. The origins of this process can be traced to the United States during the late nineteenth century, when industrial capitalism faced growing hostility during the era of the so-called robber barons. Early forms of publicity, press agency, and promotional spectacle emerged as defensive tools used by business elites to counter criticism, undermine labor movements, resist regulation, and rehabilitate public legitimacy. Figures such as P.T. Barnum demonstrated from the beginning that exaggeration, theatricality, and emotional manipulation formed central components of American publicity culture. PR therefore did not emerge as neutral information management but as a strategic weapon in ideological conflict.

The First World War intensified this transformation by demonstrating the immense power of organized propaganda in mass democracies. Scholars such as Ellul and Lambert argued that public relations became increasingly effective not merely at changing opinions but at psychologically integrating individuals into the ideological structures of capitalist society itself. Tedlow’s research into the National Association of Manufacturers revealed how American corporations coordinated large-scale PR campaigns over several decades in order to defend free enterprise against labor activism and government intervention. Before the war, persuasion relied more heavily upon appeals to reason and factual argumentation, but wartime propaganda transformed communication into an emotional science centered upon symbols, fear, nationalism, and psychological

mobilization. The Creel Committee became a defining example of this new communicative order. Through speeches, posters, films, newspapers, and coordinated publicity, the Committee successfully mobilized American opinion behind the war effort while demonstrating the extraordinary effectiveness of mass persuasion techniques. Public relations thereafter absorbed the logic of wartime propaganda into peacetime political and commercial life. Bernays, drawing heavily upon crowd psychology and psychoanalysis, openly theorized the manipulation of public opinion as a necessary mechanism for democratic governance. Authors such as Mattelart and Pratkanis later emphasized how propaganda increasingly relied upon emotional conditioning rather than rational debate, reshaping public consciousness through repetition, symbolism, and manufactured narratives. Moloney situates this development within a broader critique advanced by thinkers such as Jürgen Habermas. According to Habermas, modern PR contributes to the “re-feudalisation” of the public sphere by transforming democratic debate into staged displays managed by political and economic elites. Public relations inserts strategically designed material into media systems while orchestrating symbolic events that create the appearance of public participation without genuine deliberation. Public opinion becomes less a product of rational-critical discussion and more an outcome of managed visibility and controlled narratives. Herman and Chomsky similarly described the modern media system as operating through a propaganda model in which information is filtered to produce interpretations favorable to elite interests. PR campaigns assist this process by supplying pre-packaged narratives, expert opinions, and emotionally persuasive frames that shape journalistic agendas and public understanding. Critics such as Gandy, Stauber, and Rampton further argue that PR communication treats citizens primarily as passive targets for persuasion rather than active participants in democratic dialogue. Audiences become objects to be managed psychologically rather than autonomous individuals engaged in collective reasoning. In this framework, public relations appears not as democratic communication but as a subtle mechanism for manufacturing consent while preserving the illusion of pluralistic participation.

Against these critiques stands the influential work of James Grunig, whose theories attempted to distinguish ethical public relations from overt propaganda. Yet Moloney notes that Grunig himself inherited the recognition, already established by Bernays, that PR and propaganda remain deeply interconnected. Grunig and Hunt’s four-part typology classified press agency, public information, and two-way asymmetrical communication as inherently propagandistic because they prioritize persuasion over genuine reciprocity. Although Grunig later advocated the ideal of two-way symmetrical communication, even he admitted that persuasion remains unavoidable within PR practice. The problem arises when persuasion becomes structurally one-sided, serving institutional interests without meaningful openness to change or criticism. Grunig’s research revealed that truly symmetrical communication remains rare in practice. Most organizations continue to employ asymmetrical models designed primarily to secure advantages for clients, corporations, or governments. Earlier scholars such as Marston and Price viewed persuasion more positively as a normal component of democratic communication, but contemporary critics increasingly interpret asymmetrical persuasion as manipulation disguised as dialogue. Moloney therefore returns to the central dilemma: even if PR is propagandistic by design, do audiences actually comply with its messages? The answer remains uncertain and deeply complex. Historical evidence demonstrates that propaganda campaigns have at times shaped public consciousness successfully, as during wartime mobilizations or major corporate campaigns. Yet modern audiences are not entirely passive or defenseless. In increasingly pluralistic societies characterized by competing media voices and greater public awareness of persuasive tactics, citizens often interpret, resist, or selectively negotiate PR messages rather than accepting them automatically. The rise of media

literacy, digital communication, and ideological fragmentation complicates simplistic models of manipulation. PR continues to influence public understanding, but its effects are now contested within dense environments of competing narratives and skeptical audiences. Nevertheless, Moloney suggests that the propagandistic structure of PR remains embedded within the communicative foundations of liberal capitalist democracy itself. Public relations persists because modern societies require continuous symbolic management to stabilize institutions, secure legitimacy, and coordinate mass opinion. The democratic public sphere increasingly operates through organized persuasion rather than transparent rational deliberation. PR thus becomes both symptom and mechanism of a political order where power depends not only upon economic or legal control but upon the management of perception itself. In such a society, democracy risks becoming less a space of genuine collective reasoning and more a permanent contest between competing systems of organized influence.

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The Managed Democracy: Public Relations and the Struggle for Democratic Legitimacy

In *Rethinking Public Relations: PR Propaganda and Democracy*, Kevin Moloney confronts one of the central dilemmas of modern political communication: can public relations and democracy genuinely coexist, or does the growth of PR inevitably erode democratic life from within? This question emerges naturally once PR is understood not merely as communication but as a propagandistic “voice” used by competing interests seeking ideological, reputational, and material advantage within capitalist liberal democracies. Public relations occupies an uneasy position in democratic societies because democracy depends upon ideals of openness, rational discussion, informed citizenship, and equal participation, while PR often operates through strategic persuasion, emotional appeals, selective information, and hidden influence. Critics therefore frequently present PR as fundamentally hostile to democracy, accusing it of manufacturing consent, manipulating public opinion, and privileging elite interests over genuine deliberation. Yet Moloney insists that the relationship is more complex than a simple opposition between democracy and propaganda. Historical evidence demonstrates that the expansion of democratic institutions throughout the twentieth century occurred alongside the growth of public relations rather than in spite of it. In Britain, the rise of universal suffrage, mass elections, welfare reforms, civic freedoms, and broader equality rights coincided with the institutionalization of PR practices beginning in the 1920s. Similar developments can be observed across other liberal democracies such as the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and throughout Europe. Even in countries moving cautiously toward market reforms and limited political liberalization, such as China, public relations increasingly accompanies economic modernization. This coexistence suggests that PR does not automatically destroy democratic structures, even if it may alter their character

profoundly. Modern democratic societies have become saturated with PR practices, from corporate branding and political image management to celebrity culture, crisis communication, social responsibility campaigns, and issues management. Citizens inhabit environments where strategic communication surrounds them constantly, whether they recognize its presence or not. PR therefore cannot be dismissed simply as a peripheral distortion because it has become embedded within the operational logic of modern public life itself. Moloney rejects the optimistic claims of PR industry organizations that public relations naturally enhances mutual understanding and democratic harmony. Such assertions remain unsupported by convincing evidence and function more as professional ideology than empirical reality. Instead, Moloney proposes a more cautious position: PR may coexist with democracy neutrally and occasionally even beneficially, but its presence alone does not improve democratic quality. Public relations remains fundamentally a communicative instrument through which competing interests attempt to shape public understanding and secure favorable outcomes.

This coexistence becomes clearer when democracy is viewed not as an ideal deliberative system but as a pragmatic representative competition among organized interests. Drawing upon Posner's distinction between idealized deliberative democracy and competitive representative democracy, Moloney argues that PR aligns more naturally with the latter model. In representative systems, political parties, corporations, activist groups, unions, trade organizations, and public institutions continuously attempt to "sell" policies, identities, and interests to voters and governments. PR becomes the mechanism through which these actors make themselves visible within the public sphere. Rather than engaging in genuine dialogue with one another, competing interests often direct their messages toward governments, regulators, or public audiences in hopes of influencing policy and public opinion. Moloney illustrates this through examples such as disputes between the UK Food Standards Agency and the Salt Manufacturers' Association over public health campaigns. Both sides mobilized media strategies, websites, press statements, and persuasive messaging in order to shape public understanding. Similar communicative conflicts occur constantly between labor unions and employers, pension advocates and governments, corporations and environmental activists, or rival economic sectors competing for policy influence. Within this framework, PR functions as a relatively value-neutral promotional technique embedded in the democratic contest among organized interests. Liberal democracies effectively become marketplaces of communication where influence depends upon strategic visibility, persuasive effectiveness, and access to audiences. Yet this neutrality remains deeply problematic because communicative resources are distributed unequally. Dominant interests—large corporations, governments, wealthy institutions, and established political actors—possess far greater PR capacities than marginalized groups or ordinary citizens. As a result, the marketplace of ideas often reflects existing inequalities rather than correcting them. Nonetheless, Moloney also acknowledges arguments suggesting that PR can occasionally benefit democracy. Critics such as John Stauber distinguish between the large-scale corporate PR industry and the more general human practice of public communication. Democracy itself depends upon persuasion because citizens, movements, and organizations must communicate their concerns publicly in order to participate politically. From this perspective, PR techniques can empower weaker groups by enabling them to organize campaigns, attract media attention, mobilize supporters, and challenge dominant narratives. Civil society organizations, charities, unions, community movements, and advocacy groups all rely upon PR methods to amplify their voices within crowded communicative environments. Liberal egalitarian theorists therefore propose that democratic quality might improve if communicative inequalities were reduced through subsidies, public funding, or redistributive measures designed to provide weaker groups with greater access to PR resources. Such proposals recognize that

democracy increasingly depends upon communicative visibility, making public relations a crucial terrain of political struggle. In modern societies, political inequality often manifests not simply through economic disparities but through unequal access to symbolic influence itself.

Despite these potential benefits, Moloney ultimately warns that PR carries serious risks for democratic culture because it can reinforce existing power structures while degrading the quality of public discourse. Civil society may enrich democratic pluralism through diverse communicative voices, but dominant actors frequently drown out weaker perspectives through superior resources, media access, and professionalized communication strategies. Drawing upon Lukes's theory of power, Moloney explains that PR operates across multiple dimensions of influence. At the visible level, PR facilitates overt conflicts among competing interests within public debate. At deeper levels, however, PR shapes agendas indirectly through private lobbying, strategic framing, and the conditioning of public assumptions. Its most dangerous effect occurs when PR helps normalize existing power structures by making them appear natural, inevitable, or beyond contestation. Citizens gradually internalize ideological assumptions favorable to dominant interests without recognizing the communicative processes shaping their perceptions. PR therefore contributes not only to opinion management but to the reproduction of social legitimacy itself. Furthermore, the saturation of public life with promotional messages risks trivializing democratic discourse. Political communication increasingly resembles marketing, emphasizing image, spectacle, slogans, emotional reactions, and staged events over substantive deliberation. Citizens confronted with endless streams of strategic messaging may become cynical, distrustful, or disengaged from public debate altogether. Yet Moloney does not believe PR can realistically be eliminated from liberal democracies because its growth reflects deeper structural conditions of pluralism, capitalism, media expansion, and promotional culture. The challenge therefore becomes not abolishing PR but neutralizing its harmful effects. This requires constant vigilance from citizens, journalists, educators, regulators, and civil society organizations. Media literacy and civic education become essential defenses against manipulative persuasion. Public skepticism, investigative journalism, consumer watchdogs, and regulatory oversight may partially restrain abuses of communicative power. Proposals to redistribute communicative resources more equally could also help prevent dominant interests from monopolizing public discourse. Ultimately, Moloney presents PR as an unavoidable feature of modern liberal democracies: neither wholly compatible with democratic ideals nor entirely destructive of them. Democracy increasingly unfolds within promotional environments where organized persuasion shapes political reality continuously. The struggle therefore concerns not whether PR exists but who controls it, whose interests it serves, and whether democratic societies can preserve meaningful public debate amid the expanding machinery of strategic communication.

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The Machinery of Persuasion: Public Relations and the Architecture of Consent

In *Rethinking Public Relations: PR Propaganda and Democracy*, Kevin Moloney advances one of the most controversial arguments within communication studies: that modern public relations is fundamentally a form of weak propaganda embedded deeply within the structure of liberal democratic society. Rather than treating PR as a neutral mechanism for fostering mutual understanding, organizational harmony, or transparent communication, Moloney insists that it must be understood as competitive persuasion designed to secure advantage for those who employ it. Public relations, from this perspective, is neither accidental nor peripheral to modern society; it is an essential communicative technology of capitalist democracy itself. Since the late nineteenth century, PR has functioned as political, commercial, and ideological messaging primarily serving dominant economic and governmental interests. The professionalization of public relations during the early twentieth century—through figures such as Edward Bernays, Ivy Lee, Arthur Page, and others—marked the emergence of a systematic discipline devoted to shaping opinion, directing attention, and managing public perception on behalf of powerful institutions. Initially concentrated within corporate and governmental spheres, PR later expanded into the wider terrain of competitive pluralism that emerged after the 1960s, becoming available not only to dominant elites but also to charities, activist groups, unions, and civil society organizations. Yet Moloney argues that regardless of who employs these techniques, PR retains its essential character as weak propaganda because it remains grounded in selective communication, emotional persuasion, and strategic self-interest. This conclusion is highly unpopular within the PR industry and even within much of the academic field itself. In Anglo-American culture, the word “propaganda” carries deeply negative associations connected to fascism, totalitarianism, misinformation, and psychological manipulation. No PR practitioner openly describes their work as propaganda because such a label would destroy professional legitimacy and public trust. Consequently, public relations emerged historically as a semantic replacement for propaganda, stripped of overt associations with manipulation and instead dressed in the softer civic language of goodwill, trust, adaptation, and mutual understanding. After the Second World War especially, Western democracies increasingly rejected the term “propaganda” publicly while continuing to employ its techniques through the more acceptable vocabulary of public relations. Bernays himself recognized this transformation, observing that propaganda had become associated in public consciousness with lies and mental poisoning. Yet the disappearance of the word did not eliminate the practice. Rather, propaganda was rebranded and integrated more seamlessly into democratic culture under the respectable language of PR.

Moloney challenges dominant academic paradigms that attempt to portray PR as fundamentally symmetrical, dialogical, or altruistic. The influential Grunigian model, for example, presents ideal public relations as balanced communication between mutually respectful parties engaged in genuine dialogue and negotiation. According to this perspective, the highest form of PR seeks understanding rather than manipulation. Moloney disputes this normative ideal by arguing that most actual PR practice operates asymmetrically and self-interestedly. Grunig and Hunt themselves acknowledged that only a small minority of organizations truly employ symmetrical communication models, while the overwhelming majority engage in press agency, public information management, and persuasive communication designed to secure organizational advantage. PR therefore functions less as mediation and more as strategic advocacy. Its central purpose is to advance the interests of its principals through carefully selected information, emotional appeals, and persuasive framing. As Merton noted, mass persuasion becomes manipulative when emotional appeals overshadow factual content, and this dynamic lies at the heart of modern PR practice. Public relations is not a scientific search for truth but a promotional

activity operating within competitive social environments. Whether the client is a corporation, charity, tobacco company, environmental organization, or government agency, the communicative logic remains essentially the same: attract attention, shape interpretation, manage reputation, and secure behavioral or attitudinal advantage. Moloney therefore rejects idealistic attempts to moralize PR as inherently beneficial or socially cohesive. The techniques themselves possess no inherent ethical content because they can serve radically different interests and moral purposes. What unifies PR practices is not morality but strategic self-advancement. This promotional logic extends beyond external public communication into internal organizational life as well. Employee newsletters, corporate videos, motivational campaigns, internal branding initiatives, and organizational “culture-building” exercises all represent forms of internal propaganda designed to cultivate loyalty, shape values, and align employee identities with organizational goals. Workers increasingly become brand ambassadors within marketized organizational environments where communication serves managerial objectives rather than democratic participation. PR therefore permeates not only public discourse but institutional consciousness itself, influencing how organizations construct internal cohesion and maintain authority.

One of the most significant consequences of PR propaganda, according to Moloney, concerns the erosion of trust within democratic societies. Public relations often claims to foster trust, goodwill, and mutual understanding between organizations and publics, yet its competitive and self-interested nature undermines precisely those goals. Trust depends upon genuine, consistent behavior observed over time rather than upon strategic communication campaigns. PR practitioners, however, operate primarily as agents representing the interests of their principals, not as neutral facilitators of public understanding. Their messages are therefore inevitably shaped by the pursuit of competitive advantage. Deborah Tannen’s description of modern “argument culture” captures this increasingly adversarial communicative environment in which organizations continuously compete for attention, legitimacy, and influence. Even when PR campaigns produce temporary settlements or public compromises, trust remains fragile because audiences recognize the strategic motivations underlying much public communication. This contradiction contributes significantly to the poor public reputation of the PR industry itself. Professional associations continue promoting idealized narratives of harmony, openness, and social cohesion while actual PR practice is widely perceived as manipulative spin, image management, and elite persuasion. The growing gap between official professional rhetoric and observable practice weakens public credibility further. Moloney therefore suggests that PR institutions may eventually need to abandon outdated claims about mutual understanding and instead openly embrace their actual function as systems of communicative advocacy and strategic defense. Yet despite these tensions, PR propaganda is unlikely to disappear. It has become deeply embedded within liberal democratic systems structured around property rights, market competition, free expression, lobbying, and pluralistic conflict. Sociologically, PR arises from the fragmentation of values and interests characteristic of modern pluralist societies. Commercially, it creates vast markets in promotional communication. Politically, it serves as the “voice” of competing organizations and governments struggling to secure influence within crowded public spheres. Furthermore, as traditional journalism weakens economically and becomes increasingly dependent upon corporate communication sources, PR gains even greater influence over the information environment. The balance of communicative power shifts steadily toward organized strategic messaging while independent public scrutiny diminishes. This transformation raises serious concerns about the future quality of democratic debate, public knowledge, and media independence.

At the same time, Moloney avoids reducing PR entirely to a conspiracy of elite domination. Although historically the PR industry largely served finance capitalism, corporations, and governmental power, the expansion of competitive pluralism since the 1960s has also allowed weaker groups to appropriate PR techniques for their own struggles. Trade unions, activist networks, charities, civil rights organizations, and social movements increasingly rely upon PR methods to gain visibility and challenge dominant institutions. Consequently, PR cannot simply be divided into “bad propaganda” employed by elites and “good communication” employed by virtuous groups. The techniques themselves remain neutral instruments adaptable to different political and ethical projects. What matters are the structural inequalities governing access to communicative resources. Dominant actors generally possess far greater capacities for sustained persuasion, media access, and reputational management than marginalized groups. Nevertheless, democratic societies still retain possibilities for contestation, resistance, and scrutiny. Moloney therefore concludes that the harmful effects of PR propaganda may be mitigated through reforms aimed at equalizing communicative resources, strengthening media literacy, encouraging public skepticism, and ensuring diverse forms of scrutiny across the public sphere. Increased civic education and critical awareness may help citizens recognize persuasive manipulation more effectively. Regulatory oversight and support for independent journalism may also partially counterbalance concentrated communicative power. Ultimately, PR remains inseparable from the competitive pluralism of liberal democracy itself. It is both a symptom and a mechanism of societies organized around markets, representation, promotion, and ideological struggle. The challenge for democracy is therefore not eliminating PR—which appears impossible—but creating conditions under which strategic communication does not entirely overwhelm critical public reasoning and democratic accountability.

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The Invisible Editors: Public Relations and the Manufacture of News

In *How the Public Relations Industry Writes the News*, Jeff and Marie Blyskal expose the emergence of what they call “The Communications Elite,” a hidden yet enormously influential network of public relations professionals, government media strategists, corporate communication specialists, and political image managers who increasingly shape not merely the presentation of events but the very construction of public reality itself. The text begins with a revealing episode from October 24, 1983, on the eve of the American invasion of Grenada. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs Michael Burch leaves the Pentagon not simply as a government spokesman but as the executive of an immense communication empire larger than many traditional news organizations. His domain includes hundreds of radio and television stations, magazines, newspapers, and even film production capacities spread across the globe. This apparatus functions not as journalism in the conventional democratic sense but as a sophisticated public relations

machinery devoted to engineering perception, managing narratives, and securing public consent for state power. The symbolic significance of Burch's short nighttime journey from the Pentagon to the State Department lies not in geography but in the concentration of communicative power it represents. Within closed rooms occupied by officials from the Defense Department, State Department, National Security Council, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the United States Information Agency, strategies were designed not merely to report the Grenada invasion but to pre-construct the interpretive framework through which the American public would experience it. What emerges from this account is a portrait of modern democracy increasingly governed not through direct censorship but through anticipatory narrative management. The Communications Elite does not silence events outright; rather, it organizes the emotional and symbolic environment within which events become intelligible to the public. The invasion of Grenada therefore becomes a case study in the modern fusion of military power, political authority, and media manipulation, illustrating how public relations evolved into an operational arm of governance itself.

The PR strategy surrounding Grenada reveals the extraordinary sophistication of modern opinion management. Government communicators carefully framed the invasion as a reluctant humanitarian intervention requested by Caribbean allies rather than as an act of unilateral aggression. Press releases emphasized the protection of innocent lives, especially American students allegedly endangered on the island. Media access was meticulously controlled through selective press blackouts that restricted live television coverage while allowing carefully managed print reporting and photography. Timing became a weapon. Press conferences, official statements, military visuals, and international endorsements were synchronized to maximize emotional impact and minimize critical scrutiny. The administration understood that public opinion operates not only through facts but through sequencing, atmosphere, and repetition. By the time journalists and critics could fully investigate inconsistencies in the official narrative, the emotional architecture of legitimacy had already been established. Polling data showing a dramatic increase in President Reagan's approval ratings following the invasion confirmed the effectiveness of the operation. This was not merely public information management but the strategic manufacturing of emotional consensus. The Communications Elite understood that democratic societies no longer require overt propaganda in its classical authoritarian form because modern media systems allow governments and corporations to shape reality indirectly through selective access, framing, timing, symbolism, and spectacle. The PR state operates through an invisible choreography of narratives where the appearance of openness masks highly structured communicative control. Through this process, public relations becomes indistinguishable from governance itself. Decisions about military interventions, political crises, and national identity increasingly depend upon the successful management of perception rather than merely the exercise of force. The text therefore reveals how PR professionals function not as secondary communicators but as architects of political legitimacy.

The emergence of The Communications Elite also reflects a broader historical transformation in the relationship between journalism and power. Traditionally, democratic theory imagined journalism as an independent institution designed to monitor authority, investigate truth, and provide citizens with information necessary for rational participation in public life. Yet the rise of sophisticated PR systems fundamentally altered this relationship. PR professionals learned not merely how to communicate with journalists but how to think like journalists, anticipate newsroom needs, exploit media routines, and package information in forms optimized for immediate publication or broadcast. Michael Burch and others like him are described as "news executives" precisely because they understand that the distinction between producing news and managing news has collapsed. Public relations increasingly supplies not only commentary on events but the raw

material from which journalism itself is constructed. Press releases, staged events, expert briefings, orchestrated photo opportunities, controlled leaks, and pre-packaged audiovisual materials enter newsrooms already shaped for public consumption. As the Blyskals emphasize, nearly half of the content in major news publications is estimated to originate from PR sources. This development profoundly blurs the boundary between independent journalism and strategic publicity. Citizens consuming news often remain unaware that the narratives they encounter have already passed through elaborate systems of image management designed to advance institutional interests. The Communications Elite therefore occupies a paradoxical position: highly visible in influence yet largely invisible in public consciousness. Unlike traditional journalists whose names and reputations become public, PR operatives function behind the scenes, shaping narratives without direct accountability. Their power depends precisely upon this invisibility because the credibility of the message often relies upon obscuring its strategic origins.

This communicative transformation extends far beyond military affairs into every dimension of modern social life. The Blyskals identify figures such as Michael Deaver, Harold Burson, Herbert Schmetz, Robert Gray, and Richard Cheney as members of an expanding elite whose expertise lies in molding public perception across politics, business, and culture. Corporate branding, crisis management, political campaigns, entertainment publicity, and governmental communication increasingly converge into a unified system of strategic narrative production. The Communications Elite operates through an intricate understanding of psychology, symbolism, media timing, and institutional power. Their objective is not merely persuasion in the classical rhetorical sense but environmental control over perception itself. Modern PR therefore becomes less about isolated messages and more about constructing immersive communicative realities within which public interpretation occurs. This development corresponds closely to broader transformations identified by theorists such as Edward Bernays, Walter Lippmann, and later critics of propaganda and mass communication. Bernays argued that democratic societies required invisible governors capable of organizing public opinion amid the complexity of modern life. Lippmann similarly maintained that the average citizen could not directly comprehend the overwhelming realities of industrial society and therefore depended upon mediated “pictures in their heads.” The Communications Elite represents the institutionalization of these theories into permanent structures of professionalized influence. Unlike older forms of propaganda associated with authoritarian spectacle or wartime mobilization, contemporary PR operates continuously, quietly integrating itself into everyday governance, consumption, and cultural life. The result is a society where perception itself becomes increasingly managed through professional systems of symbolic production.

At the same time, the text implies a deeper crisis for democratic culture itself. If public opinion can be systematically shaped through orchestrated media events, controlled information flows, and invisible communication networks, then the ideal of an informed democratic citizenry becomes increasingly fragile. The problem is not simply that PR exists but that its operations often remain hidden beneath the appearance of independent journalism and spontaneous public consensus. Citizens may believe they are responding freely to events when, in reality, their emotional and interpretive environments have already been carefully structured by professional communicators. The Communications Elite therefore exercises power not primarily through coercion but through agenda-setting, framing, emotional calibration, and symbolic management. Democratic legitimacy itself becomes increasingly dependent upon media performance. Political success no longer rests solely upon policy or governance but upon controlling the communicative conditions under which policy is perceived. This creates a dangerous asymmetry between organized institutional

communicators and ordinary citizens whose understanding of reality depends upon mediated representations. The Blyskals suggest that the public remains largely unaware of the scale and sophistication of these operations, making resistance difficult because manipulation becomes normalized within everyday media consumption. PR thus evolves into a hidden infrastructure of democratic capitalism, shaping not only opinions but the very conditions under which public thought becomes possible.

Yet the text also suggests that the rise of The Communications Elite was not accidental but historically conditioned by crises that destabilized trust in traditional institutions. Vietnam, Watergate, the Iranian hostage crisis, and Cold War tensions created an environment where governments increasingly viewed communication management as essential to political survival. Public relations emerged as a strategic response to the perceived unpredictability of democratic public opinion. Rather than allowing events to interpret themselves, institutions learned to pre-manage narratives before dissenting interpretations could emerge. This anticipatory control became central to modern political administration. The Grenada invasion demonstrates how effectively such systems could shape emotional responses during moments of national uncertainty. By emphasizing urgency, humanitarianism, and international legitimacy while limiting contradictory visual evidence, the administration transformed a controversial military action into a politically successful media event. The Communications Elite therefore represents the culmination of a broader twentieth-century transformation in which communication ceased to be secondary to politics and instead became one of its primary instruments. News itself increasingly functions not as an independent reflection of reality but as a contested terrain where institutions compete to impose authoritative interpretations upon public consciousness.

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The Manufactured Event: Journalism and the Collapse of Independent News

In *Imation News – The Press and PR*, Part I, Jeff and Marie Blyskal present a disturbing portrait of modern journalism as a profession increasingly subordinated to the machinery of public relations. The text argues that the American press—and by extension democratic public discourse itself—faces a profound crisis not merely because of sensationalism, bias, or declining ethical standards, but because journalism has become structurally dependent upon PR systems for information, access, narrative framing, and even the definition of what counts as news. The traditional image of the press as an independent watchdog holding power accountable is steadily dissolving into a more troubling reality where reporters, editors, publishers, anchors, and producers increasingly function as passive distributors of narratives engineered elsewhere. Statistical evidence reflecting the collapse of public trust in journalism illustrates this deterioration. Polls from the National Opinion Research Center reveal a dramatic decline in confidence in the press between the post-Watergate period and the early 1980s. Although public dissatisfaction is often attributed to journalistic intrusiveness, inaccuracies, fabrication, bias, or sensationalism, the Blyskals insist that these symptoms conceal a deeper structural problem largely ignored even

within journalism itself: the hidden dependence of news organizations upon public relations professionals. The press, much like an addict unable to recognize the extent of its dependency, has become so entangled with PR that it often fails to perceive the consequences. Journalists continue believing themselves immune to manipulation due to professional experience and editorial judgment, yet the very routines of modern news production increasingly encourage reliance on pre-packaged information, strategic leaks, press releases, staged events, and managed access. The crisis of journalism therefore lies not simply in individual ethical failure but in the transformation of news production itself into an environment optimized for PR infiltration.

The modern news system described by the Blyskals resembles an industrial assembly line where speed, volume, and efficiency frequently override investigation, reflection, and verification. Within this accelerated environment, public relations flourishes because it supplies ready-made content precisely adapted to newsroom pressures. Carefully crafted press releases, orchestrated photo opportunities, strategic leaks, pre-written quotes, and manufactured events provide journalists with material that can be rapidly converted into publishable stories under tight deadlines. What appears publicly as independent reporting often begins as a PR initiative designed to shape public interpretation before genuine investigation can occur. The example of President Reagan's reelection campaign demonstrates this process clearly. Reagan's PR team successfully planted stories about campaign commercials in major newspapers, turning the "news" of advertising itself into free nationwide publicity for the administration. This tactic reveals how PR manipulates not only content but journalistic self-perception. News organizations believe they are reporting inside political developments while simultaneously functioning as unpaid amplifiers for political marketing campaigns. The distinction between journalism and publicity collapses because the media increasingly reports on the spectacle engineered by PR rather than independently examining political reality. The process becomes self-reinforcing: PR professionals gain influence because they understand media logic, while journalists become dependent because PR supplies constant streams of material adaptable to the demands of modern news production. Under such conditions, the manufactured event becomes indistinguishable from authentic public significance. Visibility itself becomes evidence of importance because media attention is no longer primarily determined by investigative judgment but by the effectiveness of promotional orchestration.

The Grenada invasion emerges within the text as the ultimate case study demonstrating the vulnerability of journalism to sophisticated public relations control. Hundreds of journalists gathered in Barbados found themselves effectively immobilized, waiting passively for information controlled entirely by government communicators. The United States government's strategic use of press blackouts, selective access, delayed briefings, controlled leaks, and engineered visuals transformed the invasion into a carefully managed media event. Television crews were restricted while print journalists operated within tightly controlled informational environments. The result was not simply censorship in the traditional sense but the pre-construction of permissible narrative boundaries. Journalists unable or unwilling to risk independent reporting became dependent upon official sources for updates, interpretations, and legitimacy. The few reporters who pursued genuinely independent investigation, such as Charles Lachman of the New York Post, stood out precisely because independent journalism had become exceptional rather than routine. Lachman's dangerous journey to Grenada required extraordinary effort, personal risk, and improvisation simply to circumvent PR controls and access firsthand reality. His experience symbolizes the broader crisis confronting journalism in the age of strategic communication: independent reporting increasingly demands resistance not only to governmental secrecy but to entire systems of narrative management designed to channel media behavior into predictable patterns. The Grenada

operation succeeded politically largely because the administration controlled not merely military operations but the symbolic environment surrounding them. Public perception was managed through carefully staged representations emphasizing humanitarian rescue, international legitimacy, and decisive leadership. Polling improvements in Reagan's approval ratings following the invasion demonstrated the political effectiveness of communicative control. The media, far from challenging official narratives aggressively, largely transmitted them within the frameworks established by PR strategists. Journalism therefore became integrated into the machinery of perception management rather than functioning as an independent site of democratic scrutiny.

The Blyskals situate this phenomenon within a broader historical pattern linking war, propaganda, and journalism. Historical studies such as Phillip Knightley's research into wartime correspondence reveal that journalists have frequently functioned as extensions of governmental public relations apparatuses during moments of conflict. General Eisenhower's statement that "public opinion wins war" captures the growing recognition among political and military leaders that narrative control constitutes a strategic weapon equal in importance to military force itself. Modern warfare therefore increasingly depends upon information management, symbolic framing, and emotional persuasion. Governments learned throughout the twentieth century that victory requires not only battlefield success but public consent continuously sustained through media management. The Communications Elite described in the Blyskals' broader work emerged precisely from this fusion of political authority, military strategy, and communicative expertise. Public relations professionals became central actors within governance because they understood how to manufacture legitimacy through media systems. The implications for democracy are profound. If journalism relies heavily upon institutions it is supposed to scrutinize, then the public sphere itself becomes vulnerable to systematic manipulation. Citizens believe they are consuming independently verified information when in reality they often encounter narratives already structured by governmental or corporate communicators. The press does not necessarily lie outright; rather, it becomes dependent upon frameworks, access, and priorities established externally. This subtle dependency proves more effective than overt censorship because it preserves the appearance of journalistic freedom while shaping informational outcomes indirectly.

The consequences of this PR dependence extend beyond politics and warfare into every dimension of contemporary culture. Entertainment journalism, business reporting, celebrity news, consumer information, and even local coverage increasingly rely upon public relations infrastructures supplying ready-made narratives. PR professionals understand newsroom economics intimately. They recognize that shrinking budgets, accelerating deadlines, reduced investigative resources, and the constant demand for novelty create ideal conditions for communicative manipulation. Journalism therefore shifts from investigation toward processing information flows generated elsewhere. The public encounters not raw events but pre-interpreted representations strategically optimized for media circulation. This transformation fundamentally alters democratic culture because public understanding increasingly depends upon narratives engineered by institutions pursuing specific interests. The watchdog role traditionally associated with journalism weakens as reporters become embedded within promotional systems they scarcely recognize. The Blyskals therefore describe a media landscape where the boundaries separating independent reporting from orchestrated publicity blur almost completely. Public relations no longer merely influences journalism from outside; it becomes integrated into the operational logic of news production itself.

At a deeper philosophical level, the text reveals the emergence of what might be called "imitation news"—representations that simulate the appearance of journalism while functioning primarily as instruments of strategic persuasion. The danger lies not only in misinformation but in the erosion

of public capacity to distinguish between independently verified reality and manufactured symbolic performance. Journalism increasingly becomes performative spectacle rather than critical inquiry. News events are selected, framed, timed, and emotionally calibrated according to promotional priorities rather than democratic necessity. Under these conditions, citizens may retain formal access to information while losing meaningful access to unstructured reality itself. The press remains institutionally free yet functionally dependent. Democracy continues formally while public discourse becomes increasingly colonized by invisible systems of strategic communication. The Blyskals' critique therefore extends beyond journalism into a broader diagnosis of modern democratic culture: a society saturated with publicity where visibility replaces truth, access replaces investigation, and manufactured narratives increasingly substitute for independent public understanding.

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The Marketplace of Fear: Manufactured Reality and the Selling of Power

In Jeff and Marie Blyskal's *How the Public Relations Industry Writes the News*, the transformation of modern public relations is presented not merely as a change in communication techniques but as the emergence of a system capable of reshaping reality itself through the calculated organization of images, symbols, and emotional narratives. The twentieth century witnessed the collapse of the old distinction between information and persuasion. Public discourse increasingly ceased to revolve around facts alone and instead became organized around the management of appearances. Public relations emerged as the hidden architecture behind political legitimacy, commercial persuasion, and media interpretation. In this environment, the shaping of perception became more important than the shaping of truth. The growing sophistication of communication technologies accelerated this transformation, allowing governments and corporations to intervene directly into the emotional structure of mass consciousness. Information was no longer transmitted merely to educate the public but to condition the public into desired patterns of interpretation and reaction. The citizen gradually became less a participant in democratic deliberation and more a spectator of carefully orchestrated narratives designed to provoke emotional compliance. The result was the commoditization of thought itself, where public opinion became a manufactured product circulating through the channels of media spectacle and institutional persuasion.

The destruction of Korean Airlines Flight 007 in September 1983 became one of the defining moments in the evolution of geopolitical public relations warfare. The event revealed that modern political conflict no longer operated solely through military confrontation but through the manipulation of symbolic interpretation. The United States Information Agency transformed the tragedy into a theatrical presentation designed for television audiences and diplomatic effect. Intelligence data, intercepted communications, visual imagery, translation technologies, and carefully staged media opportunities were assembled into a dramatic narrative intended to present the Soviet Union as barbaric and morally bankrupt. The power of the campaign did not rest only

in the factual content of the material but in the emotional architecture through which the information was delivered. The timing of the United Nations presentation, the placement of television monitors, the visual image of Soviet Ambassador Oleg Troyanovsky ignoring the screen, and the synchronization of media coverage across global networks demonstrated the emergence of a new form of political theater. Public relations no longer functioned merely as publicity; it became strategic perception management operating at the level of international diplomacy. The televised spectacle transformed geopolitical conflict into a cinematic moral narrative understandable to mass audiences. In this environment, war itself increasingly became inseparable from image production and emotional framing.

This transformation signaled a deeper historical shift within democratic societies. Public relations evolved into an autonomous system of symbolic engineering that no longer simply responded to events but actively produced the interpretive framework through which events were understood. Governments and corporations recognized that controlling the emotional context of information could shape public memory more effectively than controlling information itself. The authority of journalism gradually weakened as media organizations became dependent upon prepackaged narratives, official briefings, staged events, and institutional access. The distinction between reporting and promotion became increasingly unstable. Public relations professionals mastered the psychology of mediated persuasion by embedding messages within apparently independent sources. The credibility traditionally associated with journalism was quietly transferred to orchestrated communication campaigns. This process produced a new informational environment where truth was less important than plausibility and where emotional resonance often outweighed factual complexity. The public sphere became saturated with narratives optimized for visibility, repetition, and emotional impact. As spectacle replaced investigation, democratic discourse increasingly operated according to the logic of media performance rather than rational debate.

At the same time, the Soviet Union itself began adapting to this transformed communication landscape. Previously characterized by rigid propaganda methods and bureaucratic opacity, Soviet institutions increasingly recognized the necessity of appearing responsive and media-conscious within the global information war. Figures such as Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov attempted to reframe international criticism through televised performances and strategic narrative manipulation. Soviet media initiatives sought not necessarily to reveal truth but to compete within the same symbolic marketplace already dominated by Western public relations systems. This convergence revealed a disturbing historical irony. The ideological conflict between capitalism and communism gradually became mirrored in communication strategies that were increasingly similar in structure. Both systems recognized that modern power depended upon managing perception rather than merely exercising force. Public relations became the universal language of geopolitical legitimacy. The battle for territory evolved into a battle for emotional interpretation. Governments no longer merely administered populations; they administered symbolic realities.

The commoditization of thought represents one of the most profound consequences of this transformation. Under modern promotional culture, ideas themselves become marketable products competing for psychological attention within overcrowded media systems. Political beliefs, moral values, national identities, and even emotional responses are packaged and distributed according to the logic of advertising and public relations. Human consciousness becomes increasingly vulnerable to symbolic conditioning because modern communication systems reward simplicity, emotional immediacy, and visual drama over complexity or reflection. The engineering of consent described by Edward Bernays evolved into a permanent feature of democratic life. Public relations professionals learned that persuasion is most effective when audiences believe themselves to be

freely interpreting neutral information. Consequently, manipulation increasingly disguises itself as transparency, and strategic communication presents itself as spontaneous public discourse. The danger of this system lies not only in deliberate deception but in the gradual erosion of the distinction between authentic social reality and mediated simulation.

The emergence of self-validating PR networks further intensified this condition. One promotional campaign strengthens another, creating chains of mutual reinforcement between governments, corporations, media institutions, advocacy groups, and entertainment culture. Narratives circulate through interconnected channels until repetition itself creates legitimacy. Political controversies, social movements, military conflicts, and cultural anxieties become integrated into continuous cycles of symbolic amplification. In such an environment, public attention becomes the ultimate commodity. Crises are transformed into spectacles optimized for emotional engagement and ideological utility. The boundaries separating news, entertainment, propaganda, and advertising dissolve into a unified communication environment driven by visibility and influence. This condition fundamentally alters the meaning of democracy. Democratic societies traditionally depend upon informed public deliberation and independent institutions capable of scrutinizing power. Yet when communication itself becomes dominated by promotional logic, public discourse risks becoming a competition between increasingly sophisticated systems of psychological influence. Citizens are overwhelmed not by censorship alone but by the sheer abundance of strategically engineered narratives competing for emotional control. The result is not necessarily totalitarian domination but a subtler condition of managed perception in which reality itself becomes unstable and endlessly mediated.

The history of modern public relations therefore reveals more than the growth of an industry. It reveals the emergence of a civilization increasingly organized around the production and circulation of manufactured meaning. The commoditization of thought transforms communication into an instrument of political and commercial power operating beneath the appearance of free expression. In this system, the greatest struggle is no longer merely over territory, economics, or military force, but over the invisible architecture through which human beings interpret reality itself.

Blyskal, J. and Blyskal, M. (1985) PR: How the Public Relations Industry Writes the News. New York: William Morrow and Company.

Architects of Manufactured Reality: The Engineering of Consent and the Commoditization of Thought

In *PR! A Social History of Spin*, Soffia Ghouri and Niloufar Pourzad describe the rise of public relations as one of the defining instruments of modern industrial society, emerging from the social chaos unleashed by the industrial revolution and the expansion of democratic participation. As the steam engine, the multiple-press, and mass education transferred power away from monarchies and aristocracies toward the bourgeoisie, new anxieties emerged among elites who feared the political awakening of the masses. Universal suffrage and public schooling strengthened the possibility that ordinary people could challenge existing structures of wealth and authority. Public relations developed within this environment as a subtle method for containing instability while preserving the appearance of democratic freedom. Edward Bernays believed propaganda was necessary because civilization itself depended on the ability of intelligent elites to guide public opinion and transform social disorder into manageable consensus. Public relations therefore became a hidden mechanism for directing collective consciousness while avoiding overt coercion.

Rather than relying solely on censorship or force, modern power increasingly operated through persuasion, symbolism, emotional manipulation, and strategic communication. Stuart Ewen argues that twentieth-century culture cannot be understood without examining the systems of representation that shaped how people perceived reality itself. Bernays openly described the PR practitioner as an applied social scientist whose responsibility was to analyze public attitudes and manipulate them in ways favorable to institutional survival. The public was not treated as a genuinely participating democratic body but as a psychological terrain to be studied, measured, and influenced. Truth itself gradually became detached from objective reality and instead became associated with what could effectively persuade audiences. Public relations specialists learned that emotional resonance, repetition, and symbolic imagery often carried greater persuasive power than factual explanation. In this environment, the boundaries between genuine public opinion and manufactured consent became increasingly impossible to distinguish. Society entered an age where reality itself could be carefully packaged and sold through modern systems of communication.

The rise of industrial capitalism intensified the need for such persuasive systems. Massive corporations accumulated unprecedented wealth while workers, immigrants, and middle-class citizens became increasingly conscious of economic inequality and monopolistic power. Industrial magnates such as John D. Rockefeller symbolized concentrated corporate dominance, provoking widespread resentment and calls for reform. Public relations emerged partly as a defensive strategy designed to soften public hostility toward concentrated wealth. Ivy Lee pioneered techniques that transformed corporations from feared monopolies into socially beneficial institutions associated with national progress and prosperity. Corporate communication shifted away from visible arrogance and toward emotional identification with consumers and citizens. Theodore Newton Vail of AT&T believed that public sympathy for business could serve as a protective barrier against radical political movements and social unrest. Through strategic advertising campaigns and carefully constructed messaging, corporations presented themselves not as exploitative systems but as caring institutions devoted to public service and technological advancement. The corporation increasingly became a symbolic representation of modern life itself. Public relations allowed large businesses to cultivate emotional legitimacy without fundamentally altering existing power structures. At the same time, thinkers such as Walter Lippmann questioned whether ordinary citizens possessed the knowledge or rational capacity necessary for democratic self-government. Newspapers, radio, and emerging mass media technologies transformed scattered crowds into centralized audiences connected through national communication systems. Public relations specialists recognized that modern populations could be managed not merely through laws or economic pressure but through the shaping of perception itself. During World War I, the Committee on Public Information demonstrated the extraordinary effectiveness of propaganda in mobilizing public opinion. Under George Creel's leadership, the CPI used films, posters, speeches, newspapers, and patriotic symbolism to generate mass enthusiasm for war. The Four-Minute Men delivered emotionally charged speeches across the nation, revealing how collective psychology could be strategically manipulated through organized communication. Bernays later concluded that if propaganda could successfully mobilize entire populations during wartime, it could also be used during peacetime to influence politics, consumer behavior, and social identity. Social psychology further reinforced the belief that unconscious desires and emotional impulses played a greater role in human behavior than rational analysis. Those who mastered the manipulation of symbols, fantasies, and emotional associations could effectively shape the collective personality of democratic society.

As public relations matured, visual imagery gradually replaced rational argument as the dominant mechanism of persuasion. Walter Lippmann argued that images possessed extraordinary power because they bypassed critical thought and acted directly upon emotion. William P. Banning of AT&T recognized that photography and visual presentation could influence audiences more effectively than factual explanation alone. Advertisements increasingly became psychological experiences designed to evoke emotional identification rather than communicate neutral information. Radio broadcasting during the 1920s and 1930s expanded the reach of centralized communication systems by bringing nationally standardized narratives directly into private homes. Public opinion polls transformed attitudes into measurable commodities that could be monitored, analyzed, and strategically manipulated. Human thought itself became subject to commodification and management. During the Great Depression and the New Deal, Franklin Roosevelt demonstrated how modern political leadership depended upon sophisticated public relations techniques capable of restoring trust in institutions through emotional communication and symbolic reassurance. Fireside chats and carefully orchestrated media appearances reorganized public perception around narratives of recovery, national unity, and democratic renewal. Television later intensified these developments by merging entertainment, politics, and persuasion into a single visual environment. Ronald Reagan's political success reflected this transformation, as performance, image management, and emotional symbolism became inseparable from political leadership itself. Bernays described this system as the "engineering of consent," a process through which all forms of media opened pathways directly into the public mind. Public relations evolved beyond a professional industry into an invisible architecture embedded within every dimension of modern society. Governments, corporations, journalists, and advertisers increasingly relied upon symbolic management to shape public attitudes and behaviors. The result was the commoditization of thought itself, where reality became inseparable from its strategic presentation through media systems controlled by unseen engineers of persuasion.

Ghouri, S. and Pourzad, N. (2005) PR! A Social History of Spin; Mapping out the Development of PR. Simon Fraser University.

2. DISINFORMATION ORDER

Specters of Consensus: The Architecture of Imagined Threats

According to Ron Robin in *Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military-Intellectual Complex*, the Cold War transformed uncertainty into a permanent psychological atmosphere in which the enemy ceased to be merely a military opponent and became a cultural construction sustained by fear, repetition, and intellectual ritual. American political consciousness increasingly operated through rumors of hostile forces that were only partially visible yet treated as absolute realities. The adversary emerged through fragments of information, ideological assumptions, emotional projections, and institutional anxieties that together created a coherent mythology of danger. In this climate, ambiguity itself became intolerable. A society confronted with instability sought explanatory systems capable of converting confusion into certainty, even when those certainties rested upon speculation rather than evidence. The enemy therefore existed not only beyond national borders but within the symbolic structure of American discourse itself. Fear became a method of organization. The unknown was translated into recognizable narratives, while cultural codes transformed distant geopolitical tensions into immediate existential threats. Through this process, the imagined opponent acquired emotional solidity greater than many verifiable

realities. Political institutions, military agencies, and intellectual circles collectively reproduced this construction until the rumor hardened into doctrine. The result was a civilization increasingly governed by anticipatory paranoia, where imagined scenarios justified concrete policies and hypothetical dangers shaped material history. Technological fantasies such as the worship of ultimate weapons reflected this desire to escape uncertainty through mechanical superiority rather than through accurate understanding of the adversary. National security gradually evolved into a theater of symbolic reassurance in which perception mattered more than empirical confirmation. The image of the enemy became self-sustaining because it fulfilled psychological and cultural needs deeply embedded within mid-century American society. What appeared to be objective geopolitical analysis was frequently an emotional grammar through which a nation interpreted its fears, desires, and ideological insecurities.

The relationship between academic knowledge and military power intensified this transformation by converting speculative interpretations into institutional truths. Universities did not merely obey external political pressures; they actively participated in constructing intellectual systems that aligned scholarship with national security objectives. During this period, the academic world evolved into a network of entrepreneurial specialists whose research increasingly sought practical governmental application. Behavioral scientists occupied a central role within this new alliance. Psychologists, sociologists, and political theorists attempted to reduce political conflict into measurable behavioral patterns capable of prediction and control. Their work promised scientific precision while often concealing profound cultural assumptions beneath technical language. The enemy became an object of managerial interpretation rather than philosophical understanding. Human behavior was dissected into operational categories, strategic formulas, and psychological profiles intended to guide military planning. Yet this scientific posture frequently confused interpretation with objective truth. Academic experts absorbed the prejudices of their era without recognizing the ideological foundations of their own methods. The distinction between scholarly inquiry and policy engineering gradually dissolved. Intellectual authority became inseparable from governmental necessity, producing a system in which theoretical speculation acquired the force of administrative reality. In Korea, researchers attempted to decode communist communication through American mass communication theories, assuming universal psychological mechanisms where cultural complexity actually existed. At the Rand Corporation, operational code theories converted political behavior into predictive structures designed to guide negotiations and strategic calculations. Studies of prisoners of war similarly attempted to reinterpret ideology through behavioral frameworks that reflected domestic American concerns regarding class hierarchy, racial identity, masculinity, and social conformity. During the Vietnam conflict, these intellectual tendencies intensified further. Rational choice theories proposed that coercion could reshape peasant loyalties through calculated incentives and punishments, despite the absence of reliable empirical confirmation. The enemy was no longer understood historically or culturally but mathematically. Reality itself became subordinate to abstract models designed to satisfy institutional expectations. Controversial enterprises such as Project Camelot and the fabricated Report from Iron Mountain exposed the increasingly speculative nature of these academic constructions and revealed how intellectual authority could become detached from factual accountability.

The evolution of these theories reflected not only political pressure but also the unstable nature of scientific paradigms themselves. Drawing upon Thomas Kuhn's conception of paradigm shifts, the rise of behavioral science demonstrated how intellectual communities establish systems of belief that shape acceptable forms of inquiry while marginalizing alternatives. Scientific authority

appeared objective, yet it operated through collective consensus and institutional power. Early Cold War scholars embraced psychocultural interpretations that emphasized unconscious motives, emotional drives, and symbolic behavior in explaining the enemy. These frameworks mirrored broader cultural fascinations with psychoanalysis and hidden psychological structures. However, the prolonged failures of American strategy during Vietnam produced a crisis within this intellectual order. The inability of psychocultural theories to deliver practical victories undermined their legitimacy, creating conditions for the rapid emergence of rational choice theory as a replacement paradigm. This transition did not occur because definitive evidence disproved earlier assumptions. Rather, one intellectual community lost institutional authority while another acquired it. Rational choice theory promised clarity, predictability, and strategic efficiency through mathematical abstraction and economic logic. Human beings were reimagined as calculating actors responding mechanically to incentives and punishments. Although this paradigm presented itself as more scientific and objective, it remained equally speculative in its reduction of complex historical realities into simplified conceptual systems. The transformation revealed that scientific paradigms often function less as mirrors of reality than as organizational structures that regulate collective belief. Academic discourse therefore mirrored the very processes through which the Cold War enemy had originally been constructed. Both depended upon shared assumptions, institutional reinforcement, and symbolic coherence rather than complete empirical certainty. The enemy ultimately became a reflection of the culture attempting to define it. Through rumor, theory, and strategic imagination, American society created intellectual mechanisms that converted uncertainty into conviction and speculation into policy. The Cold War thus revealed how modern systems of communication and expertise possess the capacity to manufacture realities powerful enough to shape global history while remaining suspended between knowledge and myth.

Robin, R. (2001) Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military-Intellectual Complex. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Arithmetic of Obedience: The Quantification of Human Conduct

According to Ron Robin in *Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military-Intellectual Complex*, the emergence of the behavioral sciences during the Cold War represented not merely the birth of a new academic discipline but the construction of an entirely different intellectual vision of human existence. At the center of this transformation stood *The American Soldier*, a vast research enterprise whose apparently modest title concealed extraordinary ambitions. Published in 1949 under the direction of sociologist Samuel Stouffer, the project gathered hundreds of investigations and hundreds of thousands of interviews conducted among American servicemen during the Second World War. What emerged from this immense accumulation of surveys was not simply a description of military life but a new language through which human behavior could be measured, classified, predicted, and administratively managed. The project united psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, statisticians, and communication theorists into a coordinated interdisciplinary structure that challenged the fragmented traditions of older academic culture. In place of speculative philosophy or descriptive observation, the behavioral sciences proposed quantification, prediction, and methodological precision. Human beings were increasingly understood through data patterns, attitude measurements, and statistical regularities. The individual ceased to appear as a singular moral subject and instead became part of an observable behavioral system governed by measurable tendencies. This transformation reflected a deeper cultural desire within postwar America to convert uncertainty into calculable order. Statistical techniques appeared capable of revealing hidden social laws that could stabilize both domestic

society and international strategy. Through surveys concerning propaganda, leadership, race relations, morale, and social stratification, *The American Soldier* established the belief that collective behavior could be scientifically organized with the same precision associated with the physical sciences. The project therefore symbolized the convergence of military administration, technological rationality, and academic ambition. Human consciousness itself became a field of strategic calculation. The wartime soldier was transformed into numerical evidence through which institutions sought to decode loyalty, obedience, and ideological adaptation. Beneath the scientific vocabulary of neutrality there emerged a powerful political aspiration: the management of society through empirical control.

The revolutionary character of the behavioral sciences provoked intense resistance because it threatened older conceptions of intellectual life. Traditional scholars criticized the project for reducing complex social realities into disconnected fragments of statistical information devoid of philosophical depth. To many critics, the behavioral approach represented the triumph of technique over wisdom. Historians and theorists feared that social science was abandoning the difficult task of interpreting civilization in favor of mechanically collecting data. Arthur Schlesinger Jr., one of the most severe opponents, condemned the project as intellectually barren and accused its architects of replacing critical thought with computational procedures. He argued that the promise of predictive certainty merely disguised conceptual emptiness. What claimed to resemble scientific objectivity often generated banal conclusions presented with artificial authority. The behavioral scientist appeared less as a philosopher of society and more as a technician of measurement. Yet defenders of the new paradigm celebrated precisely these features. They viewed the interdisciplinary structure of the project as a liberation from the rigid compartmentalization of earlier academic traditions. Behavioral methods offered practical applications capable of influencing politics, communication, education, and military planning. Innovations such as attitude scaling, group analysis, and quantitative models of opinion formation seemed to provide unprecedented insight into collective behavior. The project's supporters believed they were constructing a politically conscious science able to intervene directly within modern society. In this vision, knowledge no longer remained contemplative but became operational. The social sciences were reorganized around prediction, efficiency, and policy relevance. Even concepts such as relative deprivation acquired widespread influence because they appeared to explain social dissatisfaction through measurable comparisons rather than through historical or economic structures. The behavioral sciences thus reshaped intellectual authority itself. Academic legitimacy increasingly depended upon quantitative methodologies, institutional funding, and practical applicability. The university became integrated into broader systems of administrative governance, where research was valued not only for theoretical significance but for its utility within national policy frameworks. The decline of *The American Soldier* in later decades did not erase its influence because many of its assumptions had already become absorbed into mainstream academic practice. The language of surveys, behavioral patterns, and measurable attitudes survived long after the original project faded from direct prominence.

The creation of the behavioral sciences also relied upon powerful myths that concealed the institutional and political forces behind their emergence. Advocates of the field constructed a narrative in which the behavioral sciences appeared as a spontaneous intellectual discovery born from the natural evolution of American ingenuity. According to this mythology, the concept emerged simultaneously across several universities, reflecting the creativity and independence of democratic academic culture. This narrative concealed the deeper realities of philanthropic sponsorship, military interest, and institutional coordination that shaped the field from its

inception. Foundations such as Rockefeller and Ford provided enormous financial support for interdisciplinary research capable of serving broader political and administrative objectives. Behavioral science therefore evolved not in isolation but within a network linking universities, private foundations, and governmental agencies. Modernization theory became one of its central ideological frameworks. This theory proposed that societies naturally progressed from traditional forms toward rational industrial modernity, with the United States positioned as the ultimate historical model. Underdevelopment was interpreted less as the result of exploitation or colonial history and more as evidence of psychological and cultural deficiency. Such assumptions justified both domestic social engineering and foreign intervention. The language of modernization transformed political power into scientific necessity. American institutions presented themselves not as historically contingent systems but as universal expressions of progress itself. Within this framework, behavioral science acquired immense ideological authority because it appeared capable of identifying the psychological obstacles preventing societies from reaching modernity. The field therefore merged empirical research with civilizational narratives that legitimized Cold War policies across the globe. Yet beneath the rhetoric of objectivity remained a profound tension. Behavioral scientists rejected crude behaviorism and insisted that human beings possessed inner motivations, beliefs, and aspirations that shaped action. At the same time, they attempted to reduce these internal complexities into statistically verifiable patterns capable of prediction and control. The individual was simultaneously autonomous and mathematically calculable. This contradiction revealed the deeper ambition of the behavioral sciences: to reconcile freedom with administration by transforming subjective experience into observable data. Ultimately, the rise of the behavioral sciences demonstrated how modern institutions seek to convert human uncertainty into systems of measurable order while presenting those systems as neutral truths rather than historically situated constructions.

Robin, R. (2001) Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military-Intellectual Complex. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Markets of Strategy: The Invisible Orthodoxy of Power

According to Ron Robin in *Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military-Intellectual Complex*, the emergence of Cold War think tanks transformed the geography of intellectual life in the United States by weakening the traditional monopoly universities once held over the production of knowledge. After the Second World War, academic expertise increasingly migrated into a growing network of military-funded civilian institutions known as Federal Contract Research Centers. These organizations cultivated an atmosphere of interdisciplinary experimentation that appeared liberated from the rigid departmental divisions dominating older academic culture. Scholars moved fluidly between universities, government agencies, and strategic research centers, creating a new intellectual class whose authority derived not from isolated scholarship but from direct engagement with national policy. Think tanks presented themselves as laboratories of innovation where economists, sociologists, strategists, psychologists, and political theorists could cooperate in solving the urgent dilemmas of modern society. Within these institutions, intellectual boundaries were treated as obsolete obstacles inherited from an outdated academic order incapable of responding to global crisis. Figures such as Thomas Schelling embodied this transformation. Although primarily known as a strategic analyst, Schelling extended his work into fields as varied as organized crime, racial segregation, and domestic political conflict. His broad intellectual range symbolized the new ideal of the renaissance expert capable of applying universal analytical frameworks across every dimension of

social life. Think tanks therefore represented more than administrative institutions; they reflected a cultural reorganization of knowledge itself. Research increasingly emphasized practical application, predictive capability, and strategic utility rather than contemplative theoretical inquiry. The scholar was transformed into an active participant within systems of governance and national defense. Yet beneath the appearance of unrestricted intellectual exploration remained a profound ideological consistency. The apparent diversity of research topics concealed a unified political grammar rooted in faith in individualism, market competition, and the moral necessity of resisting centralized authority. Freedom within the think tank environment often meant the freedom to reproduce dominant assumptions in increasingly sophisticated forms. Intellectual mobility existed, but ideological boundaries remained largely invisible because they were accepted as natural truths rather than political choices.

The work of Thomas Schelling demonstrated how this new intellectual culture universalized the principles of free enterprise across radically different social phenomena. Whether discussing organized crime, urban segregation, or international conflict, Schelling repeatedly interpreted monopoly power as the fundamental source of social disorder. In his analysis of criminal organizations, he argued that the true danger did not lie merely in illicit activity itself but in the monopolistic control such organizations exercised over markets and institutions. Competition, even within illegal economies, appeared as a corrective mechanism capable of weakening concentrated power. Similar assumptions shaped his interpretation of segregation, where social divisions were understood less as structural historical realities and more as temporary distortions that would gradually dissolve in the absence of coercive centralized interference. Across all these subjects, open competition and decentralized individual choice were elevated into universal principles governing both domestic society and global politics. Such reasoning reflected the deeper ideological architecture of the think tank world. Although these institutions celebrated intellectual freedom and interdisciplinary creativity, their analyses remained confined within the unquestioned framework of Cold War liberal capitalism. Behavioral scientists and strategists often accepted as self-evident the necessity of American military power and the inevitability of Soviet expansionism. The national security state itself rarely became an object of critical examination because it functioned as the invisible horizon within which intellectual activity unfolded. Even institutions celebrated for pluralism reproduced remarkably consistent assumptions regarding free markets, anti-communism, and geopolitical intervention. This hidden orthodoxy shaped the direction of research as effectively as any formal censorship. Scholars could challenge methods, propose alternative strategies, and debate tactical questions, but the foundational premises of American global leadership remained largely unquestioned. Think tanks therefore generated a peculiar form of intellectual conformity disguised as innovation. The rhetoric of openness concealed a tightly regulated ideological environment in which strategic imagination operated inside predetermined political boundaries. What appeared to be objective expertise often functioned as the technical administration of an already accepted worldview.

The aspiration to create what military planners described as a “Behavioral Manhattan Project” revealed the extent to which Cold War institutions sought to weaponize psychological and social knowledge. In the early 1950s, military authorities increasingly viewed the global conflict not simply as a conventional geopolitical struggle but as a total psychological confrontation transcending territorial borders. The enemy was imagined as both external and internal, capable of infiltrating consciousness, culture, and social stability itself. This apocalyptic vision encouraged the expansion of behavioral research into an essential component of national defense. Military-funded centers such as Rand, HumRRO, HRRI, and the Operations Research Office became

laboratories for constructing techniques of persuasion, morale management, and psychological warfare. Scholars attempted to develop intellectual weapons capable of securing strategic victory without relying exclusively on physical destruction. Human behavior became an operational battlefield. Yet the prestige of these institutions concealed persistent contradictions. Although think tanks advertised themselves as arenas of open competition among ideas, true pluralism remained largely illusory because only a small number of heavily funded organizations possessed meaningful access to policymakers and governmental influence. Independent voices rarely possessed equivalent institutional resources. At the same time, humanistic scholars were increasingly marginalized in favor of behavioral scientists whose quantitative and supposedly value-neutral methods appeared safer and more administratively useful. Humanists, associated with cultural criticism, historical ambiguity, and politically suspect literary traditions, were regarded with suspicion within the national security environment. Behavioral science therefore gained authority precisely because it presented itself as technical rather than ideological. Statistical models, systems analysis, and psychological measurements created an illusion of neutrality while reinforcing dominant political assumptions. The think tank culture ultimately revealed how modern institutions transform intellectual life into an extension of strategic administration. Knowledge ceased to function primarily as a search for truth and instead became integrated into systems designed to preserve political order, manage perception, and rationalize power. The Cold War intellectual landscape thus produced a new type of scholar whose freedom depended upon remaining within the invisible ideological architecture of the national security state.

Robin, R. (2001) Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military-Intellectual Complex. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Echoes of Persuasion: The Hidden Mechanics of Collective Belief

According to Ron Robin in *Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military-Intellectual Complex*, the development of behavioral sciences during the Cold War transformed the understanding of communication, propaganda, and political behavior by rejecting simplistic assumptions about mass manipulation and replacing them with a far more intricate vision of psychological and social influence. The famous panic surrounding the 1938 radio adaptation of *War of the Worlds* became one of the defining moments through which behavioral scientists attempted to reinterpret the relationship between media and society. At first glance, the incident appeared to confirm widespread fears that electronic communication possessed almost supernatural power over the public imagination. Reports of frightened listeners fleeing homes, preparing for catastrophe, or accepting the fictional Martian invasion as reality seemed to demonstrate that modern media could directly penetrate the minds of passive audiences. Yet scholars such as Hadley Cantril, Hazel Gaudet, and Herta Herzog challenged this interpretation through systematic investigation. Their analysis argued that the broadcast itself did not mechanically produce panic. Most listeners quickly recognized the fictional nature of the program by comparing information, checking alternative sources, or noticing contradictions within the narrative. Only a minority succumbed to fear, and even these reactions emerged not from the magical authority of radio but from preexisting emotional conditions, anxieties, and social circumstances. Communication therefore ceased to appear as a direct injection of ideology into defenseless minds. Instead, behavioral scientists proposed that individuals selectively interpreted messages according to already established mental frameworks. Media influence depended less upon the inherent force of words and more upon the psychological readiness of audiences to accept particular narratives. Fear, belief, and persuasion were rooted within the subjective structures of

consciousness long before any broadcast reached the listener. This interpretation fundamentally altered the intellectual landscape of propaganda studies. The audience was no longer understood as an undifferentiated mass but as a collection of psychologically distinct individuals whose responses reflected hidden emotional dispositions and cultural expectations. The event revealed that communication operates most effectively when it resonates with desires and insecurities already embedded within the social body.

The behavioral sciences extended these insights beyond media panic into broader theories of political and social conduct. Early theorists increasingly argued that public behavior represented the external expression of internal psychological tensions rather than the product of purely rational calculation. Society itself was reconceived as a mosaic of subjective emotional structures shaped by childhood experience, unconscious impulses, and intimate social relationships. Thinkers such as Gordon Allport emphasized that adult motivations were deeply influenced by hidden psychological residues formed during early development. Human actions therefore appeared less autonomous and rational than traditional political theories assumed. Alongside this psychological perspective emerged a complementary sociological approach centered upon the concept of primary groups. Contrary to theories portraying modern industrial society as fragmented and atomized, behavioral scientists insisted that close-knit social circles continued to shape identity, loyalty, and collective action even within advanced technological civilizations. These primary groups functioned as the emotional foundations of social order. Within military life, studies revealed that soldiers frequently lacked profound ideological commitment to abstract national goals. Their courage, loyalty, and willingness to fight often depended instead upon bonds of friendship, masculine solidarity, and mutual obligation within small informal groups. The battlefield therefore became less a theater of ideological conviction and more a network of intimate emotional loyalties. Similar patterns emerged within civilian society. Electoral behavior, for example, was interpreted not primarily as the outcome of rational political analysis but as the consequence of tribal affiliation, social influence, and communal identification. Behavioral scientists thus challenged liberal assumptions about the independent rational citizen. Human beings appeared driven less by conscious ideological principles than by emotional attachments and collective belonging. The persistence of primary groups demonstrated that modern society had not transcended older forms of tribal cohesion but had merely reorganized them within bureaucratic and industrial structures. Beneath the language of individual autonomy remained enduring systems of emotional dependence and social conformity that shaped both private life and public action.

A further dimension of behavioral theory emerged through the incorporation of psychoanalytic concepts into political analysis, particularly in the work of Harold Lasswell and the tradition known as psychopolitics. Lasswell proposed that political movements derived much of their force from the projection of unconscious personal conflicts onto public symbols and ideological struggles. Political discourse therefore functioned as a symbolic theater through which individuals externalized inner anxieties, frustrations, and insecurities. According to this interpretation, ideological fanaticism frequently concealed unresolved psychological tensions seeking collective expression. Lasswell attempted to reduce these processes into analytical formulas capable of systematic study, treating propaganda not as mystical persuasion but as a measurable interaction between symbolic language and unconscious emotional structures. Through quantitative content analysis, behavioral scientists sought to decode political rhetoric by identifying recurring patterns, symbols, and emotional triggers embedded within public communication. This methodological emphasis reflected a broader intellectual ambition characteristic of Cold War academia: the desire to impose measurable order upon the ambiguity of human behavior. Statistical models, surveys,

and analytical frameworks promised the possibility of transforming irrationality into predictable systems. Yet beneath this scientific aspiration remained a profound suspicion toward human consciousness itself. Both the sociological theory of primary groups and the psychoanalytic theory of unconscious projection shared a common conclusion: individuals were rarely motivated by transparent rational understanding. Grand ideological narratives, patriotic declarations, and public convictions often masked deeper emotional and psychological processes invisible even to those expressing them. The behavioral sciences therefore reconstructed politics as a domain governed by hidden forces operating beneath conscious awareness. Human beings appeared trapped between unconscious drives and collective social pressures while believing themselves to be rational actors. In attempting to explain this contradiction, Cold War behavioral theory transformed communication into a science of emotional resonance and symbolic management, revealing how modern systems of persuasion rely not upon logic alone but upon the manipulation of identity, fear, belonging, and unconscious desire.

Robin, R. (2001) Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military-Intellectual Complex. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

The Resistant Mind: Propaganda and the Limits of Persuasion

According to Ron Robin in *Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military-Intellectual Complex*, one of the most significant transformations within Cold War communication theory emerged from the gradual realization that audiences were far less passive and obedient than earlier propaganda models had assumed. During the Korean War, American behavioral scientists entered the conflict zone convinced that communist societies might reveal the ultimate secrets of psychological control and information management. In the winter of 1950, a group of American academics attached to the Air Force Human Resources Research Institute traveled through the unstable Korean landscape seeking direct contact with a society undergoing rapid Sovietization. The mission itself symbolized the changing role of intellectuals in the Cold War era. Professors no longer remained distant observers safely confined within university libraries and seminar rooms. Instead, they became active participants in strategic operations where social research functioned as an instrument of geopolitical analysis. Wilbur Schramm, one of the leading architects of communication studies, joined sociologist John Riley and anthropologist John Pelzel in examining the social effects of communist occupation within Korea. Their work represented an unprecedented attempt to apply American behavioral theories directly within an enemy environment rather than relying solely upon secondhand reports, defectors, or ideological texts. The Korean battlefield therefore became not only a military struggle but also a laboratory for studying mass persuasion, public opinion, and ideological resilience. The mission aimed to translate the unfamiliar reality of communist social organization into the recognizable conceptual language of American behavioral science. Researchers attempted to identify the mechanisms through which authoritarian systems controlled populations while simultaneously searching for weaknesses that could be exploited strategically. Yet the most important conclusion to emerge from this investigation fundamentally challenged simplistic theories of propaganda. The scholars discovered that even under highly controlled political conditions, human beings did not merely absorb ideological messages automatically. Individuals interpreted, resisted, reshaped, or ignored information according to their preexisting beliefs, cultural assumptions, and social loyalties. Communication therefore appeared less as an act of direct mental domination and more as a process of negotiation between message and audience. The human mind retained a stubborn capacity for reinterpretation even within environments saturated by political control.

The Korean studies revealed how deeply behavioral scientists distrusted grand ideological explanations of social conflict and instead favored interpretations rooted in cultural predispositions and local social structures. Rather than attributing Korean divisions primarily to class struggle or political doctrine, researchers increasingly framed conflict as the continuation of older communal rivalries and inherited social patterns. John Pelzel's anthropological investigations into rural Korean communities exemplified this tendency by emphasizing ancient familial tensions and village hierarchies as the hidden foundations of political instability. In this interpretation, communism appeared less as a transformative ideological force and more as a temporary surface expression imposed upon deeper cultural structures. Behavioral science thus translated foreign political realities into familiar sociological categories understandable to American academic discourse. This approach reflected a broader Cold War tendency to reinterpret revolutionary movements not as rational responses to material conditions but as manifestations of enduring psychological and cultural tensions. At the same time, communication theorists associated with the Human Resources Research Institute developed what became known as the "limited effects" paradigm. Rejecting earlier assumptions that propaganda functioned like a magical injection directly shaping mass consciousness, they argued that media influence operated primarily by reinforcing attitudes already present within the audience. Communist information systems attempted to monopolize communication through concentrated control of radio, newspapers, and political messaging, yet such monopolization proved incapable of producing total ideological conformity. Individuals filtered propaganda through existing social networks, emotional loyalties, and cultural predispositions. Opinion leaders within communities often exerted greater influence over public attitudes than official broadcasts themselves. Trusted local figures mediated information, interpreted events, and shaped communal responses far more effectively than impersonal state media. Even communist regimes recognized this limitation and increasingly relied upon direct interpersonal agitation rather than mass communication alone. The importance of primary groups therefore reappeared within communication theory as an explanation for the resilience of social identity against centralized persuasion. Human beings remained embedded within networks of trust, loyalty, and collective belonging that complicated any attempt at total psychological control. The audience emerged not as an empty vessel awaiting ideological instruction but as an active interpretive force capable of resisting imposed narratives.

These developments profoundly reshaped the intellectual foundations of Cold War communication studies by collapsing the distinction between democratic persuasion and totalitarian propaganda. Scholars such as Schramm and Paul Lazarsfeld increasingly argued that all systems of mass communication operated according to similar psychological principles regardless of political ideology. Both democratic and authoritarian societies depended upon reinforcement, social influence, and the management of preexisting beliefs rather than upon absolute manipulation. This theoretical convergence blurred moral distinctions traditionally used to separate Western information practices from Soviet propaganda. Communication became understood as a universal process of social conditioning shaped by audience predispositions, interpersonal influence, and selective perception. The publication of works such as *The Reds Take a City* transformed complex field research into accessible anti-communist narratives for broader American audiences, yet these simplified interpretations often excluded the perspectives of marginalized or politically ambiguous groups. The resulting narratives reproduced Cold War ideological assumptions even while claiming scientific neutrality. Nevertheless, the deeper theoretical implications of the research could not be entirely contained within propagandistic frameworks. The limited effects paradigm undermined the fantasy of omnipotent propaganda by demonstrating that public opinion could never be fully engineered from above. Audiences retained interpretive autonomy rooted in cultural

memory, social belonging, and emotional predisposition. This realization carried unsettling implications for all modern systems of communication. If persuasion depended upon reinforcement rather than direct transformation, then political messaging functioned less by creating entirely new beliefs than by activating latent anxieties and confirming existing worldviews. The power of propaganda therefore resided not in its capacity to invent consciousness from nothing but in its ability to organize and intensify emotional structures already present within society. Cold War behavioral science revealed that the greatest obstacle confronting every project of ideological control was the stubborn complexity of the audience itself—a collective body that continuously translated official narratives into meanings shaped by its own experiences, loyalties, and hidden psychological landscapes.

Robin, R. (2001) Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military-Intellectual Complex. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

The Synthetic Consensus: Algorithms and the Manufacture of Reality

According to Samantha Bradshaw and Philip N. Howard in *The Global Disinformation Order: 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation*, contemporary political power has entered a new phase in which propaganda is no longer confined to speeches, newspapers, or centralized broadcasting systems but has become embedded within the invisible architecture of digital communication itself. Computational propaganda emerged as a system through which algorithms, automation, and massive collections of personal data are mobilized to influence public perception, regulate political discourse, and reshape the boundaries of collective reality. Over only a few years, organized social media manipulation expanded dramatically across the globe, evolving from isolated political experiments into a normalized instrument of governance and ideological struggle. Governments and political organizations increasingly discovered that the digital sphere could function simultaneously as a surveillance mechanism, a psychological laboratory, and a battlefield of symbolic control. In dozens of countries, political actors established coordinated operations designed to influence domestic opinion, suppress opposition, and amplify carefully engineered narratives through social networking platforms. What distinguished this new form of propaganda from earlier historical models was not simply technological sophistication but the intimate integration of persuasion into the routines of everyday communication. Social media no longer operated merely as a neutral channel for public expression. Instead, it became an environment structured by hidden interventions, automated amplification, and algorithmic visibility. The digital citizen encountered information that appeared spontaneous and decentralized while often originating from highly organized systems of strategic manipulation. Authoritarian governments exploited these techniques to marginalize dissent and erode the possibility of genuine public deliberation, while sophisticated state actors extended such practices internationally through coordinated influence campaigns. The emergence of China as a global participant in this sphere symbolized a decisive transformation in geopolitical communication. Platforms once imagined as instruments of democratic openness became adaptable tools of information control capable of transcending national borders. The modern public sphere increasingly resembled an engineered informational ecosystem where perception itself became subject to strategic design. Propaganda ceased to function solely through censorship or ideological repetition and instead operated through the management of attention, emotional stimulation, and algorithmic circulation.

The organizational structures supporting computational propaganda revealed the convergence of political authority, technological systems, and private institutional power. Governments, military

agencies, political parties, and commercial actors formed overlapping networks dedicated to shaping digital discourse. In many nations, official communication ministries and security institutions directly coordinated social media campaigns aimed at influencing public attitudes or destabilizing opposition movements. Electoral politics became deeply entangled with these techniques as parties employed fake followers, manipulated advertising, and coordinated digital harassment to shape voter behavior and manufacture artificial popularity. The boundaries separating state authority, private enterprise, and ideological activism increasingly dissolved. In some cases, governments openly collaborated with communication firms and technological consultants; in others, loosely connected individuals voluntarily reinforced dominant narratives because of shared political convictions. This fusion created a decentralized yet highly effective system of influence in which propaganda circulated not only from centralized authorities but through networks of sympathetic actors reproducing the same ideological signals. The digital environment therefore generated a new form of political participation where manipulation itself became participatory. Citizens unknowingly contributed to systems of amplification that transformed emotional reactions into strategic political outcomes. Cyber troops utilized diverse forms of technological identity, ranging from automated bots to human-controlled profiles and hybrid “cyborg” accounts combining algorithmic efficiency with direct human intervention. Hacked accounts, fabricated personas, manipulated videos, and coordinated reporting campaigns further destabilized the distinction between authentic communication and engineered perception. Information warfare increasingly relied upon distraction, polarization, and emotional exhaustion rather than direct persuasion alone. Public attention was fragmented through endless streams of conflicting narratives designed to produce confusion and distrust. Harassment campaigns discouraged participation while manipulated media blurred the line between evidence and fabrication. The strategic objective was not necessarily to convince populations of a single ideological truth but to weaken the very possibility of shared epistemological certainty. Under such conditions, democratic discourse risked collapsing into perpetual informational instability where every narrative appeared simultaneously credible and suspect. The architecture of digital communication itself became inseparable from political struggle.

The rise of computational propaganda also revealed how modern systems of power increasingly depend upon the industrialization of behavioral prediction and emotional management. Cyber troop operations varied enormously in scale and sophistication, from temporary electoral teams to permanent institutional structures supported by substantial financial resources and technological expertise. In countries with highly developed operations, propaganda functioned as a continuous state project integrated into both domestic governance and international strategy. Multi-million-dollar contracts, data analytics systems, and coordinated communication infrastructures transformed disinformation into a professionalized industry operating alongside traditional military and diplomatic institutions. The digital public sphere became governed by an economy of visibility in which influence could be purchased, automated, and strategically amplified. This transformation reflected a broader historical shift in the nature of political authority. Earlier propaganda systems depended heavily upon centralized broadcasting and ideological uniformity, whereas computational propaganda relied upon personalization, behavioral targeting, and adaptive messaging capable of exploiting individual psychological vulnerabilities. Citizens were no longer treated as members of a homogeneous mass audience but as collections of behavioral data points subject to micro-targeted persuasion. Algorithms analyzed patterns of consumption, fear, anger, and desire in order to optimize emotional engagement and maximize ideological reinforcement. The management of information increasingly resembled a predictive science of human behavior. Yet beneath the technological sophistication of these systems remained an enduring philosophical

contradiction. The digital age promised unprecedented openness, participation, and democratic communication, while simultaneously enabling extraordinary forms of surveillance, manipulation, and social control. Platforms originally celebrated as instruments of liberation evolved into infrastructures capable of regulating perception on a global scale. The modern disinformation order therefore revealed the fragility of truth within technologically mediated societies. Public reality itself became unstable, continuously reconstructed through coordinated systems of amplification, algorithmic filtering, and emotional engineering. In this environment, the struggle for political power increasingly centered not upon the control of territory alone but upon the control of informational consciousness and the symbolic structures through which societies interpret reality itself.

Bradshaw, S. and Howard, P.N. (2019) The Global Disinformation Order: 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation. Oxford: Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford.

The Ecstasy of Ruin: Beauty Against the Horror of Existence

According to Brian Leiter in “The Truth Is Terrible,” Nietzsche’s philosophy emerges from a confrontation with realities so devastating that most human beings instinctively conceal them beneath habits, illusions, and comforting narratives. The terrible nature of truth does not refer merely to isolated moments of suffering but to the entire structure of existence itself. Human beings are condemned to perish absolutely, not only as individuals but eventually as a species whose consciousness, memories, achievements, and desires will vanish without residue. This awareness transforms life into a paradoxical condition in which every act of ambition unfolds beneath the certainty of annihilation. Even fame, intellectual achievement, or cultural remembrance provide only temporary consolation because both the remembered and the rememberers disappear into oblivion. Nietzsche inherits from Schopenhauer the conviction that human life is trapped within endless cycles of striving and dissatisfaction. Desire continually reproduces itself, generating temporary gratification only to renew emptiness and longing once more. The structure of existence therefore appears fundamentally without purpose or rational justification. Physical suffering intensifies this tragic reality. Disease, psychological torment, premature death, and irreversible decline strike human beings arbitrarily, without moral logic or transcendent meaning. The world offers no explanation for pain and no guarantee that virtue will be rewarded. The universe remains indifferent to human expectations. Yet Nietzsche’s insight extends beyond existential despair into the moral fabric of civilization itself. Societies present themselves as embodiments of justice and rationality while simultaneously resting upon exploitation, violence, and domination. Public morality becomes a mask concealing systems of cruelty that sustain political and economic order. Reality therefore appears profoundly amoral, resistant to the ethical narratives through which humanity attempts to justify itself. Even human knowledge proves unstable. The senses deceive, ordinary consciousness constructs illusions, and moral beliefs emerge from false assumptions regarding free will and rational agency. Human beings live within symbolic interpretations mistaken for truth. The terrible nature of existence lies precisely in this recognition that suffering, illusion, and impermanence are not accidental disruptions within life but its fundamental conditions.

Faced with these devastating truths, Nietzsche rejected both religious consolation and rational optimism, seeking instead a radically different justification for existence. The central philosophical problem became not how to escape suffering but how to affirm life despite its inherent terror. Against the Christian vision that condemns earthly existence as deficient and redeemable only

through transcendence, Nietzsche proposed what he called the Dionysian perspective. This attitude does not deny suffering, mortality, or illusion; rather, it embraces them as inseparable dimensions of existence. Life becomes valuable not because it fulfills moral or rational standards but because it can be experienced aesthetically. Nietzsche therefore transforms aesthetics from a secondary cultural concern into the deepest philosophical response to nihilism. Existence is justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon. Art does not eliminate pain or provide objective truth. Instead, it seduces human beings into affirming life emotionally and sensually despite full awareness of its horrors. Through artistic intoxication, suffering becomes transfigured into experience rather than merely endured as burden. Nietzsche describes this aesthetic state through the concept of Dionysian ecstasy, a form of affective intensity that overwhelms despair by immersing consciousness in sensation, rhythm, beauty, and emotional power. The function of art resembles neither moral instruction nor detached contemplation. Against Kant's theory of disinterested beauty, Nietzsche insists that aesthetic experience stimulates desire, vitality, and the will itself. Beauty promises happiness not through rational certainty but through emotional arousal. Artistic intoxication temporarily suspends the oppressive weight of existential awareness and restores attachment to life. This experience resembles sensual pleasure because it operates directly upon the body and emotions rather than upon abstract reason. Art becomes a narcotic against nihilism, yet unlike religious asceticism it does not deepen guilt or resentment. Ascetic ideals teach human beings to despise earthly existence and interpret suffering as punishment or deficiency. The Dionysian perspective instead transforms suffering into part of life's creative spectacle. Illusion itself acquires affirmative value because certain illusions intensify vitality and make existence bearable. Nietzsche therefore overturns the traditional philosophical hierarchy privileging truth over appearance. If truth alone destroys the will to live, then aesthetic illusion becomes psychologically indispensable. Human beings require forms of intoxication capable of counterbalancing the unbearable weight of reality.

Nietzsche's reflections ultimately culminate in an aristocratic vision of human existence centered upon the rare individuals capable of confronting terrible truths without collapsing into despair. Most people survive through ordinary consolations, communal routines, ideological beliefs, or comforting delusions that shield them from existential confrontation. Nietzsche's interest, however, lies with exceptional individuals who perceive the full horror of existence while still affirming life. For these higher human beings, aesthetic genius becomes the ultimate justification of survival. The spectacle of greatness embodied in extraordinary creators, artists, and historical figures provides evidence that existence can generate moments of overwhelming intensity and beauty despite its underlying chaos. Figures such as Beethoven or Napoleon symbolize not moral perfection but the transformation of suffering into creative force. Their existence demonstrates that life, even when stripped of transcendent meaning, can still produce extraordinary expressions of power and artistic vitality. Such genius remains inseparable from pain because creation itself emerges through struggle, excess, and internal conflict. Nietzsche therefore interprets suffering not merely as an obstacle but as a necessary condition for higher forms of human achievement. The aesthetic affirmation of life does not redeem humanity collectively. Nietzsche remains deeply skeptical regarding the masses, whom he often regards as trapped within mediocrity, resentment, and herd morality. The continuation of exceptional existence appears more significant to him than universal happiness or democratic equality. This disturbing aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy reveals the extent to which aesthetic value replaces traditional ethical concerns. Life gains justification through intensity, creation, and artistic greatness rather than through moral progress or social harmony. The terrible truths of existence remain undefeated, yet they are transformed through aesthetic experience into conditions that can be endured and even celebrated. Nietzsche's

philosophy therefore presents art not as escape from reality but as the highest form of resistance against nihilism—a means through which human beings continue affirming existence while fully aware of its impermanence, cruelty, and illusion.

Leiter, B. (2002) 'The Truth Is Terrible', in Nietzsche on Morality. London: Routledge.

The Manufactured Horizon: Democracy Beneath the Weight of Narrative

According to The Thinker's Guide to How to Detect Media Bias & Propaganda, democratic society depends not merely upon formal political rights but upon the intellectual capacity of citizens to recognize manipulation, question dominant narratives, and critically evaluate the information shaping their perception of reality. A population deprived of this critical capacity becomes vulnerable to systems of influence that operate beneath the appearance of neutrality and objectivity. Political freedom without informed judgment therefore collapses into illusion. The guide begins from the premise that modern media possess extraordinary power to shape collective consciousness through what may be described as media logic—the strategic construction of narratives designed to resonate emotionally and culturally with particular audiences. News organizations increasingly master techniques of persuasion capable of presenting selective interpretations as objective truth. Most citizens, however, lack the training necessary to identify ideological slants, recognize omissions, or analyze the hidden assumptions embedded within reporting. As a result, they often inherit a worldview confined within the cultural and national framework of their own society. This narrowing of perception does not necessarily arise from secret conspiracies or coordinated deception. Instead, it emerges organically through the sociocentric nature of human communities. Journalists, editors, and media institutions exist within specific historical, religious, political, and cultural traditions that shape both their assumptions and their audience's expectations. Every society interprets world events through symbolic frameworks reflecting its own collective experiences and emotional investments. An Israeli editor, an Arab journalist, a Russian broadcaster, or an American commentator inevitably perceives global affairs differently because each perspective is rooted within distinct historical narratives and cultural loyalties. The production of news is therefore inseparable from the social environment in which it is created. Limitations of time, space, and economic pressure intensify this process by forcing journalists to condense complex realities into simplified narratives capable of rapid consumption. What emerges is not deliberate falsehood but selective representation shaped by cultural familiarity and institutional necessity. The audience encounters a world already filtered through assumptions appearing so natural that they become invisible. Democracy consequently faces a paradox: citizens believe themselves informed while often remaining enclosed within a narrow interpretive horizon constructed by the very institutions claiming to educate them.

The guide dismantles several myths sustaining public faith in media objectivity by exposing the unavoidable subjectivity underlying all acts of news construction. News stories resemble historical narratives in that both involve selecting a limited number of details from an immeasurable background of possible facts. Since no report can contain every relevant element, omission becomes inevitable. Objectivity therefore cannot mean presenting total reality because total reality remains inaccessible. Journalists decide which facts deserve emphasis, which perspectives matter, and which events possess significance. These decisions are shaped not only by conscious ideology but by emotional proximity, cultural expectation, and audience identification. Events affecting one's own nation or social group appear naturally more important than distant suffering elsewhere. Consequently, news organizations across different societies prioritize radically different realities

while each claims fidelity to truth. Media outlets reinforce prevailing assumptions because audiences gravitate toward narratives confirming familiar beliefs and moral self-images. Even irrational prejudices become normalized when they resonate with dominant cultural expectations. The guide distinguishes between several forms of objectivity in order to reveal how easily the language of fairness can conceal manipulation. Genuine intellectual humility acknowledges the limits of one's knowledge and recognizes the possibility of error within every report. A more demanding form of objectivity actively engages multiple conflicting perspectives and attempts to understand their strengths and weaknesses before reaching conclusions. Yet there also exists a counterfeit objectivity that merely imitates open-mindedness while secretly defending predetermined interests and ideological commitments. In such cases, the appearance of balanced reasoning becomes a sophisticated rhetorical performance designed to legitimize existing power structures. Media consumers themselves contribute to this distortion because people instinctively interpret narratives aligning with their own worldview as objective while dismissing opposing interpretations as biased. Liberal audiences perceive liberal journalism as fair; conservative audiences perceive conservative reporting as truthful. News organizations therefore adapt themselves to the expectations of their consumers, producing narratives that validate rather than challenge existing beliefs. The result is an informational environment where ideological reinforcement replaces critical inquiry, and objectivity becomes less a pursuit of truth than a mechanism for preserving communal identity.

The guide ultimately argues that propaganda cannot be understood solely as overt political manipulation because the very structure of mainstream news production often reproduces propagandistic effects even without explicit intention. News tailored to specific cultural audiences naturally minimizes opposing viewpoints while amplifying perspectives compatible with dominant social assumptions. Media institutions avoid narratives likely to provoke collective guilt or destabilize national self-images. Certain atrocities receive extensive emotional coverage while others remain marginal, depending largely upon how closely they align with the moral identity of the intended audience. The sociocentric nature of media ensures that allies are portrayed sympathetically while enemies are represented through language emphasizing danger, irrationality, or moral deficiency. Word choice itself becomes ideological. Descriptors associated with intelligence, courage, and legitimacy are selectively assigned according to prevailing political loyalties. This linguistic framing gradually shapes emotional perception long before explicit argumentation begins. Yet the guide does not descend into fatalistic relativism. Even biased or propagandistic reporting can yield valuable insight when approached critically. The essential task of the informed citizen is to reconstruct narratives by identifying omissions, recognizing favored viewpoints, and seeking alternative perspectives excluded from mainstream discourse. Critical consumers of news refuse passive consumption and instead interrogate the assumptions underlying every report. They analyze which audiences are being addressed, which emotional reactions are being encouraged, and which historical contexts have been suppressed. Such individuals understand that the primary purpose of mainstream media is often not educational enlightenment but commercial and ideological reinforcement. True democratic consciousness therefore requires intellectual independence capable of resisting sociocentric pressures. The emergence of what William Graham Sumner described as a "critical society" would depend upon educational systems cultivating skepticism, analytical rigor, and resistance to emotional manipulation. Yet this possibility remains difficult because both media institutions and audiences frequently prefer comforting affirmation over destabilizing complexity. Alternative publications and dissenting voices become essential precisely because no single perspective can encompass total reality. Truth emerges only through confrontation between competing interpretations rather than through

unquestioned acceptance of dominant narratives. The survival of democratic culture thus depends not upon the elimination of bias—which may be impossible—but upon the cultivation of citizens capable of recognizing how narratives are constructed and how power operates through the management of perception itself.

Paul, R. and Elder, L. (2004) The Thinker's Guide to How to Detect Media Bias & Propaganda. Dillon Beach, CA: Foundation for Critical Thinking.

The Silent Archive: Buried Narratives and the Discipline of Perception

According to *The Thinker's Guide to How to Detect Media Bias & Propaganda*, one of the most powerful mechanisms through which modern media shape public consciousness is not direct falsification but selective visibility. Every day, countless events unfold across the world, yet only a tiny fraction become recognized as legitimate “news.” This process of selection is never neutral because the stories chosen for prominence generally reinforce the dominant assumptions, moral identity, and political mythology of the culture consuming them. Narratives that affirm the national self-image rise to the foreground, while those capable of producing moral discomfort, political doubt, or historical self-criticism are marginalized, minimized, or ignored altogether. What one society buries another may elevate as urgent revelation. During periods of geopolitical conflict, this selective process intensifies dramatically. Each side constructs a moral drama in which its own actions appear defensive, rational, and honorable while the enemy becomes the embodiment of cruelty, irrationality, and aggression. Media narratives function as emotional mirrors reflecting collective self-esteem rather than as transparent windows into reality. Research on enemy images demonstrates that populations instinctively assign virtues to themselves and vices to their opponents, transforming complex historical conflicts into simplified moral oppositions. Language itself becomes part of this symbolic warfare. Allies are described through words associated with courage, civilization, and humanity, whereas enemies are represented through terms suggesting barbarism, deceit, or fanaticism. Stories that confirm these emotional expectations are amplified because they strengthen social cohesion and national identity. Contradictory evidence, however, threatens the psychological stability of the collective narrative and is therefore pushed toward invisibility. The media environment gradually becomes a system of emotional filtration through which societies protect themselves from destabilizing self-awareness. Citizens are not merely informed about the world; they are conditioned to perceive themselves as morally justified participants within a larger historical struggle. The result is a form of sociocentric consciousness in which reality becomes subordinated to the maintenance of cultural self-image.

The guide illustrates this process through numerous examples of stories allegedly ignored, minimized, or underreported because they conflict with dominant national narratives. Reports concerning civilian casualties caused by sanctions, allegations of torture, complicity in foreign atrocities, resistance to international treaties, or opposition to war crimes tribunals are presented as evidence that mainstream media frequently avoid information capable of undermining the moral legitimacy of state power. Such omissions reveal that propaganda often operates less through fabrication than through strategic silence. Certain realities remain technically accessible yet are denied emotional significance through limited coverage, marginal placement, or rapid disappearance from public discourse. Stories challenging the image of a nation as a defender of democracy, human rights, or global peace become politically inconvenient because they disrupt the symbolic framework sustaining public loyalty. Media institutions therefore participate in a subtle management of collective guilt by limiting sustained attention to events implicating the

home society in violence, hypocrisy, or moral contradiction. This selective reporting shapes not only political understanding but also emotional perception. Populations become habituated to empathize intensely with suffering caused by official enemies while remaining psychologically distant from suffering associated with their own governments or allies. The moral imagination becomes geographically and ideologically selective. Even when critical information appears briefly within mainstream outlets, it is often isolated from broader structural analysis and quickly displaced by narratives more compatible with prevailing assumptions. The guide emphasizes that this process does not necessarily emerge from a coordinated conspiracy among journalists. Economic pressures, audience expectations, cultural traditions, and institutional routines collectively produce a media environment favoring ideological continuity. News organizations depend upon audience trust and commercial survival, both of which encourage narratives reinforcing familiar identities rather than provoking existential discomfort. The omission of disturbing realities thus becomes systemic rather than purely intentional. Propaganda functions through the normalization of perspective itself, shaping which questions appear reasonable, which emotions are appropriate, and which historical memories deserve collective attention.

Against this background, the guide proposes the development of critical consciousness as the only meaningful defense against sociocentric media systems. A critical reader understands that every narrative contains both visible information and hidden absences. The task of interpretation therefore involves examining not only what is reported but also what has been omitted, marginalized, or emotionally neutralized. Critical consumers of media actively seek dissenting voices, alternative historical frameworks, and perspectives emerging from outside their own cultural environment. The rise of the Internet expands the possibility of encountering such alternative narratives, enabling individuals to access international publications, human rights organizations, dissident journals, and non-mainstream analyses challenging official accounts. Yet access alone is insufficient. The essential transformation involves cultivating intellectual habits capable of resisting emotional conformity and ideological reassurance. A genuinely informed citizen learns to compare competing interpretations, recognize rhetorical framing, identify selective language, and reconstruct events from multiple perspectives simultaneously. This process destabilizes the illusion that any single source can provide complete objective truth. Every narrative reflects particular assumptions, loyalties, and historical conditions. The critical thinker therefore abandons passive consumption in favor of active reconstruction. Such individuals recognize that patriotism grounded solely in affirmation easily degenerates into mythological self-worship. More constructive forms of civic loyalty require the willingness to confront uncomfortable realities and acknowledge moral contradictions within one's own society. The guide ultimately presents democracy itself as dependent upon this difficult intellectual discipline. Without citizens capable of questioning dominant narratives, public discourse becomes increasingly vulnerable to manipulation through omission, emotional framing, and symbolic simplification. A critical society would not eliminate bias entirely, since complete neutrality may be impossible, but it would cultivate populations less susceptible to the emotional seductions of propaganda. The preservation of democratic consciousness therefore depends upon the capacity to move beyond the comforting boundaries of national self-image and engage reality through continual acts of skeptical, historically informed, and self-reflective inquiry.

Paul, R. and Elder, L. (2004) The Thinker's Guide to How to Detect Media Bias & Propaganda. Dillon Beach, CA: Foundation for Critical Thinking.

The Apocryphal Machine: Disinformation and the Hunger for False Reality

According to Paul Baines, Nicholas O'Shaughnessy and Nancy Snow in *The SAGE Handbook of Propaganda*, and Nicholas O'Shaughnessy in "From Disinformation to Fake News: Forwards into the Past," propaganda has returned not as an archaic residue of authoritarian politics but as a dominant condition of modern public life, intensified by suspicion, digital acceleration, and the collapse of confidence in shared reality. The contemporary world lives in an apocryphal atmosphere where authenticity is constantly doubted, where institutions once trusted to mediate truth appear weakened, and where populations simultaneously desire certainty and distrust almost every claim to possess it. Into this vacuum propaganda enters with renewed force. It does not merely fabricate messages; it supplies emotional order when social life is fragmented by ideology, gender conflict, national antagonism, religious fear, and political exhaustion. The editors insist that propaganda is not new, yet its speed, reach, and adaptability have changed profoundly. After the Cold War, many assumed that propaganda had declined with the ideological systems that once openly organized it. The attacks of September 11 and the propaganda surrounding terrorism, war, radicalization, and counter-radicalization shattered that illusion. Propaganda again became visible as an instrument of violent mobilization, state justification, emotional discipline, and symbolic warfare. Its morality remains contested because some regard it as a neutral technique that may serve good or evil purposes, while others understand it as inherently manipulative. Yet whatever moral judgment one adopts, propaganda remains embedded in mass society and cannot be separated from modern communication. It operates through institutions, governments, movements, corporations, military structures, and extremist groups seeking not merely to inform but to provoke action, obedience, fear, identification, or silence. Its power lies in directed communication backed by organized interest. It does not invite free inquiry; it narrows perception toward predetermined conclusions. In this sense, propaganda is not simply communication with bias. It is communication converted into an instrument of behavioral pressure.

The modern study of propaganda must therefore confront both its historical continuity and its technological mutation. Older forms of persuasion did not disappear when digital media emerged. Books, posters, speeches, rituals, demonstrations, films, radio, and public spectacles remain active, while social media and networked platforms add new speed and intimacy to their circulation. The handbook's structure reflects the breadth of this field by examining concepts, methods, counter-propaganda, and historical contexts across multiple regions and political systems. Its larger claim is that propaganda cannot be reduced to a single medium, a single ideology, or a single type of regime. It appears in democracies and authoritarian states, in wartime and commercial life, in terrorism and business, in public diplomacy and populist movements. O'Shaughnessy's discussion of disinformation deepens this argument by showing that falsehood is rarely successful because the public is merely stupid or passive. Disinformation often works because people are busy, emotionally invested, and drawn toward information that confirms what they already suspect or desire. It may contain partial truth precisely to make its deception more credible. Its goal is not always to produce firm belief but to create acquiescence, doubt, cynicism, paralysis, and division. The public may not fully believe the fiction, yet it may participate in it because the fiction satisfies a deeper ideological or emotional need. Political leaders can become novelists of public reality, composing stories that justify wars, movements, resentments, and collective fantasies. The history of disinformation reaches back to ancient strategic deception, from the illusion of military strength to the Trojan horse, and continues through forged documents, fabricated atrocity stories, wartime manipulation, scientific fraud, anti-vaccination mythology, and digital influence campaigns. What changes is not the impulse to deceive but the machinery available for spreading deception.

Disinformation thrives because there is a market for it. False narratives are often more novel, dramatic, and emotionally satisfying than careful truth. They travel quickly through fragmented media systems where traditional journalism has weakened and partisan channels merge news with entertainment. Digital platforms intensify confirmation bias by enclosing individuals within echo chambers that reward outrage, fear, and identity reinforcement. In this environment, disinformation creates parallel realities. It blends fact and invention until deception no longer appears as a lie but as an alternative universe with its own emotional coherence. The aim may be domestic control, foreign destabilization, ideological recruitment, or the destruction of trust itself. When all sources become suspect, public reason loses its ground. Citizens are not only misled; they are trained to doubt the possibility of knowing. This is why disinformation is more corrosive than ordinary falsehood. It attacks the conditions under which truth can be recognized, debated, and defended. Its psychological force lies in fear, belonging, resentment, and the comfort of simple explanations for complex disorder. Its political force lies in division, because a society unable to agree on reality becomes easier to paralyze and govern through confusion. The handbook's broader contribution is to show that propaganda and disinformation must be studied through history, psychology, sociology, media analysis, counter-propaganda, and global comparison. No single method is sufficient because propaganda itself is adaptive. It enters war, science, terrorism, democracy, commerce, and culture. It can appear as atrocity narrative, patriotic myth, fake news, public relations, radical fantasy, or moral rescue. The unresolved task is not only to expose falsehood but to understand why human beings desire certain falsehoods, why institutions sponsor them, and why societies repeatedly surrender reality to narratives that make fear meaningful.

Baines, P., O'Shaughnessy, N. and Snow, N. (eds.) (2019) The SAGE Handbook of Propaganda. London: SAGE;

O'Shaughnessy, N. (2019) 'From Disinformation to Fake News: Forwards into the Past', in Baines, P., O'Shaughnessy, N. and Snow, N. (eds.) The SAGE Handbook of Propaganda. London: SAGE.

The Algorithmic Self: Emotion and Reality in the Post-Truth Condition

According to Ignas Kalpokas in "Post-Truth and the Changing Information Environment," contemporary society has entered a historical transformation in which the relationship between truth, identity, and communication has been fundamentally restructured by digital media systems. The rise of the Internet did not merely increase the quantity of available information; it altered the very conditions through which human beings experience reality. Society has shifted from the Information Age into what Kalpokas describes as the Experience Age, an environment where emotional resonance, immediacy, and mediated perception dominate public consciousness. In this new condition, media no longer simply transmits information about the world but actively shapes the form through which the world becomes intelligible. The process of mediatization extends deeply into everyday life, forcing institutions, relationships, and even personal identity to conform to media logic. Human experience increasingly passes through algorithms, search engines, recommendation systems, databases, and social networking platforms that determine what becomes visible and what remains hidden. Reality itself appears filtered through technological architectures that continuously organize perception. Individuals construct digital versions of themselves through clicks, likes, searches, and interactions, producing algorithmic doubles capable of being analyzed, predicted, and commercially exploited. The self becomes fragmented into streams of behavioral data that platforms use to personalize communication and optimize

emotional engagement. Communication itself gradually loses the depth of direct interpersonal dialogue and becomes compressed into gestures of reaction, affirmation, and symbolic participation. Emotional signals circulate more rapidly than reflective thought. Community formation increasingly depends not upon physical proximity or rational agreement but upon shared emotional atmospheres generated through digital interaction. In such an environment, affect acquires greater political importance than factual accuracy because emotions move more efficiently through networks than careful analysis. Political discourse therefore adapts itself to these conditions by privileging emotional intensity, immediacy, and symbolic identification over evidence or reasoned debate. Public life becomes structured around feelings of belonging, outrage, anxiety, and validation rather than around objective verification.

The Experience Age emerges from a condition of informational excess in which the sheer volume of available content overwhelms the individual's capacity for critical evaluation. Faced with endless streams of competing narratives, people increasingly select information according to emotional gratification rather than intellectual rigor. Attention becomes the most valuable commodity within digital society because every platform competes to capture and maintain engagement. Content must therefore be immediate, emotionally stimulating, and constantly renewed in order to survive within the accelerated circulation of media. The experience itself becomes more important than the informational value of what is consumed. Individuals navigate the digital environment through rapid intuitive judgments shaped by emotional resonance, convenience, and personal relevance. Verification, contextualization, and reflective thought require time and cognitive effort that the architecture of digital communication actively discourages. This transformation creates what Kalpokas identifies as a pleasure economy in which data functions as the central resource used to tailor experiences capable of maximizing audience satisfaction. Social media algorithms intensify this process by filtering information according to previous interactions, preferences, and behavioral patterns. The resulting filter bubbles surround individuals with narratives that confirm pre-existing assumptions while marginalizing dissenting perspectives. Opinion-congruent information begins to feel inherently truthful simply because it harmonizes with the emotional and ideological structure already present within the user. Contradictory evidence appears alien, hostile, or irrelevant because the digital environment systematically reduces exposure to alternative interpretations. The self-tailoring of information thus creates fragmented realities in which different social groups inhabit increasingly isolated cognitive universes. Truth ceases to function as a shared public standard and instead becomes personalized according to emotional compatibility and social belonging. Post-truth politics flourishes precisely within this condition because its success depends less upon proving factual claims than upon satisfying emotional desires and reinforcing collective identity. Political actors no longer need to persuade through evidence alone. They need only frame messages in ways that resonate affectively with audiences already predisposed toward certain beliefs. What matters is not whether a statement corresponds to objective reality but whether it produces emotional affirmation and psychological comfort.

The power of post-truth narratives is ultimately sustained through collective reinforcement and narrative simplicity. Once an emotionally satisfying claim enters a filter bubble, it is rapidly amplified by social networks operating as echo chambers. Repetition across multiple interconnected sources creates the impression of universal acceptance, transforming popularity into a substitute for truth. Immediate feedback mechanisms such as likes, shares, and supportive comments provide emotional gratification that strengthens attachment to particular beliefs regardless of their factual basis. Individuals become embedded within communities of mutual

affirmation where social belonging depends upon adherence to shared narratives. Even moments of doubt are neutralized because the surrounding collective continuously reinforces the same interpretive framework. In this sense, post-truth is not simply deception imposed from above but a participatory process sustained through communal emotional investment. Narratives play a decisive role within this system because human beings seek coherent stories capable of organizing chaotic experience into meaningful patterns. Post-truth messages succeed not through isolated false statements but through emotionally accessible narratives that explain the past, justify the present, and project visions of the future. These narratives simplify complexity into morally intuitive dramas populated by recognizable enemies, victims, and heroes. Their effectiveness lies precisely in their immediacy and emotional clarity within a world saturated by informational overload. Complex realities become reduced to symbolic scripts that require little analytical effort yet provide strong emotional orientation. The distinction between factual accuracy and emotional truth gradually collapses because narratives are judged according to how convincingly they resonate with personal identity and collective feeling. Kalpokas therefore presents post-truth not as a temporary crisis but as a structural condition produced by the convergence of digital media, algorithmic personalization, emotional communication, and fragmented social realities. Truth becomes detached from verification and reorganized around affective experience. The contemporary subject no longer encounters reality directly but through technologically mediated systems that prioritize engagement, emotional stimulation, and personalized confirmation. In this environment, public discourse increasingly operates according to the logic of emotional resonance rather than the logic of objective evidence, transforming post-truth into one of the defining conditions of modern existence.

Kalpokus, I. (2019) 'Post-Truth and the Changing Information Environment', in Baines, P., O'Shaughnessy, N. and Snow, N. (eds.) The SAGE Handbook of Propaganda. London: SAGE.

The Manufacture of Trust: Corporate Power and the Language of Persuasion

According to Jordi Xifra in "Public Relations and Corporate Propaganda," modern public relations cannot be understood merely as a neutral practice of communication management because its historical development reveals a deep and persistent connection to propaganda, ideological influence, and the strategic preservation of corporate power. One of the most revealing examples occurred during the Gulf War when the public relations firm Hill & Knowlton orchestrated a campaign on behalf of Citizens for a Free Kuwait. Central to this operation was the emotional testimony of a young Kuwaiti girl named Nayirah before the United States Congress, where she claimed to have witnessed Iraqi soldiers murdering infants in a hospital. The story later proved fabricated, and Nayirah herself was revealed to be the daughter of the Kuwaiti Ambassador to the United States. The event became emblematic of how public relations could manipulate emotional perception in order to mobilize political consent and justify military intervention. The significance of this episode extends beyond one particular deception because it exposes the structural logic of corporate persuasion itself. Public relations increasingly operates within a symbolic economy where emotional narratives, moral imagery, and carefully constructed spectacles shape public reality more effectively than factual argument. The goal is not necessarily to present objective truth but to create conditions favorable to institutional interests. The emotional intensity of the fabricated testimony transformed geopolitical conflict into a moral drama capable of bypassing critical reflection. Public relations therefore emerged not as a transparent mediator between organizations and society but as a mechanism capable of manufacturing legitimacy through strategic communication. This historical continuity explains why early pioneers of public relations

such as Edward Bernays and Ivy Lee openly embraced connections between public relations and propaganda. Only after the catastrophic associations of propaganda with fascism and totalitarianism during the twentieth century did the field seek to distance itself from that terminology and rebrand itself as a more ethical and democratic form of communication. Yet beneath the linguistic transformation remained the same fundamental question: whether public relations genuinely facilitates mutual understanding or whether it primarily functions to secure power by shaping perception and directing collective behavior.

Efforts to ethically redefine public relations emerged particularly within Europe, where intellectual movements attempted to oppose manipulative communication with more humanistic models of social responsibility. Thinkers influenced by the French personalist tradition, especially Lucien Matrat, argued that authentic public relations should reconcile the interests of organizations with the needs of the broader community rather than merely manipulate audiences for strategic advantage. Matrat criticized the practices of major corporations whose communication resembled the methods described by theorists of propaganda such as Jacques Ellul. In response, he advocated the creation of ethical frameworks grounded in trust, dialogue, and human dignity. This perspective contributed to the development of the Code of Athens, an international code of ethics inspired partly by the principles of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. The ambition behind such initiatives was to distinguish public relations from advertising and propaganda by emphasizing mutual respect rather than psychological conditioning. James E. Grunig's influential models of public relations further reinforced this ethical aspiration by proposing a movement from unidirectional publicity toward symmetrical communication based on dialogue and reciprocal understanding. According to this idealized vision, organizations and publics would engage in balanced exchanges where communication served collective problem-solving rather than unilateral persuasion. Yet Xifra emphasizes that even these ethical models remain entangled within broader structures of power. The promise of symmetrical communication often conceals asymmetrical realities in which corporations possess disproportionate economic resources, institutional influence, and access to media systems. Dialogue itself can become strategic, functioning less as genuine reciprocity and more as a sophisticated technique for managing dissent and securing legitimacy. The language of transparency, participation, and social responsibility may therefore mask deeper processes of ideological reinforcement. Public relations does not merely communicate organizational interests; it shapes the symbolic environment within which those interests appear natural, reasonable, and socially beneficial. The ethical rebranding of public relations consequently risks transforming power into something aesthetically acceptable rather than fundamentally changing its operation.

At its deepest level, corporate propaganda functions as a system for sustaining hegemony through the management of meaning. Xifra argues that propaganda has always been linked to ideology because it seeks to secure dominant positions by shaping how reality itself is interpreted. From ancient rulers who legitimized authority through monuments and inscriptions to modern corporations that cultivate reputational power through branding and strategic communication, propaganda has evolved alongside structures of social control. Corporate propaganda extends beyond the mere transmission of information. It transforms private interests into universal values by presenting corporate goals as expressions of public necessity, economic progress, or collective well-being. Public relations therefore operates politically even when it appears commercially neutral. By promoting consumer identities, status aspirations, and market-oriented values, corporate communication reinforces broader ideological systems associated with capitalism and social hierarchy. Drawing upon thinkers such as Foucault, Weber, and Bourdieu, Xifra

demonstrates that power is not exercised solely through repression or direct coercion but through the production of meaning itself. Symbolic power shapes how individuals perceive reality, evaluate legitimacy, and understand their place within society. Corporate propaganda becomes effective precisely because it presents itself as common sense rather than domination. Reputation management is therefore inseparable from struggles over cultural authority and social influence. Organizations attempt to control not only products and markets but also the interpretive frameworks through which society evaluates moral legitimacy, responsibility, and success. Through carefully managed narratives, symbols, and emotional appeals, corporate interests become embedded within everyday assumptions about consumption, identity, and social order. Public relations thus participates in the production of hegemony by transforming power relations into seemingly natural realities. Beneath the rhetoric of mutual understanding remains a system dedicated to preserving institutional dominance through the strategic organization of communication. Corporate propaganda does not merely persuade individuals to purchase products or support policies; it shapes the symbolic architecture through which contemporary societies understand value, authority, and truth itself.

Xifra, J. (2019) 'Public Relations and Corporate Propaganda', in Baines, P., O'Shaughnessy, N. and Snow, N. (eds.) The SAGE Handbook of Propaganda. London: SAGE.

Tongues of Existence: The Hidden Power of Human Speech

According to Suzette Haden Elgin in *The Language Imperative*, human language is not merely a practical instrument for exchanging information but one of the deepest and most defining dimensions of existence itself. The text begins by engaging with the provocative suggestion associated with Noam Chomsky that an outside observer, encountering the immense variety of human languages, might nevertheless conclude that all people speak variations of a single underlying tongue. Despite the visible differences between English, Navajo, Japanese, Albanian, Hawaiian, or Kwakiutl, they may all represent dialects of a broader human linguistic condition that Elgin imagines as “Terran.” This thought experiment immediately transforms language from a cultural accessory into a philosophical question concerning the nature of humanity itself. If all languages are expressions of a deeper common structure, then the diversity of human speech becomes both a testimony to unity and a source of profound difference. The existence of a universal linguistic foundation raises unsettling questions regarding power, identity, and value. Are some languages more useful, more prestigious, or more capable of shaping thought than others? Does speaking multiple languages expand consciousness or fracture identity? Could humanity benefit from reducing linguistic diversity in favor of efficiency and global communication, or would such simplification destroy irreplaceable forms of human experience? These questions reveal that language cannot be dismissed as “only talk.” Human civilization invests enormous emotional, educational, political, and economic energy into language precisely because it shapes every aspect of social life. Unlike other animals, human beings do not merely communicate signals; they acquire native languages that structure memory, identity, perception, and belonging. Language is as essential to human existence as flight is to birds. The inability to acquire language or the loss of one’s linguistic world constitutes a catastrophic rupture in human life. Yet despite language’s central importance, modern society possesses surprisingly limited understanding of what it truly means to speak more than one language fluently. The psychological, cultural, and existential consequences of multilingualism remain surrounded by contradiction, speculation, and political anxiety. Human beings live through language constantly, yet rarely comprehend the extent to which language lives through them.

Elgin presents multilingualism as a field saturated by conflicting myths, hopes, and fears because societies remain uncertain whether linguistic plurality represents enrichment or threat. Some people regard the acquisition of multiple languages as a practical skill comparable to mastering several musical instruments, useful for travel, work, and social advancement. Others see multilingualism as something far deeper: the acquisition of additional worldviews, emotional structures, and even alternate selves. Every language potentially opens access to a distinct symbolic universe, offering new ways of perceiving reality, organizing relationships, and interpreting existence. If this is true, then multilingualism multiplies human experience itself. Yet alongside these optimistic perspectives persist fears of fragmentation, social exclusion, and cultural instability. Elgin illustrates these contradictions through ordinary American scenarios in which language becomes entangled with class aspirations, immigrant identity, educational policy, professional anxiety, and national belonging. One parent proudly celebrates a child's early mastery of Spanish through educational technology, imagining multilingualism as a pathway toward intellectual success. Another parent condemns the use of Tagalog at home, fearing that maintaining the native language will prevent social integration and condemn future generations to economic marginalization. A hospital worker discovers that her ability to interpret Chinese prevents dangerous misunderstanding, yet her language skill simultaneously generates suspicion within her personal life, as though multilingual competence might appear socially pretentious or culturally disloyal. School administrators struggle between acknowledging the importance of foreign languages and sacrificing language programs for subjects deemed economically or culturally more urgent. These examples reveal that language policy is never merely educational. Every linguistic decision reflects deeper anxieties about assimilation, identity, social mobility, nationalism, and cultural hierarchy. Society simultaneously admires multilingualism as sophistication while fearing it as division. Languages become symbols onto which political hopes and insecurities are projected. The contradiction intensifies further in nations that invest public resources into teaching foreign languages while simultaneously supporting "English Only" movements that attempt to suppress minority linguistic expression. Such tensions reveal a civilization uncertain whether linguistic diversity represents strength or danger.

Beneath these social contradictions lies Elgin's larger philosophical argument that humanity urgently requires a deeper understanding of language before making irreversible decisions about linguistic preservation, education, and cultural policy. Modern societies often approach language politically, emotionally, or economically rather than scientifically or philosophically. Decisions regarding which languages deserve institutional support, educational investment, or cultural legitimacy are frequently shaped by expediency, nationalism, or prejudice instead of genuine comprehension of what languages contribute to human life. Yet language does far more than facilitate communication. It structures perception, organizes memory, shapes communal identity, and mediates emotional reality. To lose a language is therefore not simply to lose vocabulary or grammar but to lose an entire mode of human experience accumulated across generations. The possibility of a global society intensifies this dilemma because increased interconnectedness creates pressure toward linguistic standardization while simultaneously exposing humanity to unprecedented cultural diversity. Calls for international languages promise efficiency and mutual understanding, yet they also risk flattening the plurality of perspectives embedded within different linguistic traditions. Elgin refuses simplistic answers because the issue concerns the future of human consciousness itself. If languages carry distinct worldviews, then preserving linguistic diversity may be essential for preserving the full range of human imagination. At the same time, the inability to communicate across linguistic boundaries generates isolation, mistrust, and misunderstanding. Humanity therefore confronts a paradoxical condition in which both unity and

diversity appear necessary. The text ultimately challenges the widespread assumption that language is secondary or superficial within human existence. Instead, language emerges as one of the primary forces through which societies define themselves, individuals construct identity, and civilizations negotiate the boundaries between inclusion and exclusion. Elgin calls for intellectual humility in approaching these questions because current knowledge remains profoundly incomplete. Human beings understand that language defines them, yet they still scarcely understand how deeply multiple languages reshape thought, emotion, social organization, and the possibilities of collective life itself.

Elgin, S.H. (2000) The Language Imperative. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing.

The Fractured Tongue: Identity and Power in Multilingual Existence

According to Suzette Haden Elgin in “Introduction: What Is Multilingualism,” multilingualism is not a simple linguistic skill but a deeply contested social, psychological, and political condition whose meaning shifts depending on how societies define language itself. The text begins by exposing a striking contradiction within American cultural attitudes toward multilingualism. Despite the availability of bilingual resources such as tutors, educational programs, books, and language technologies, many bilingual parents struggle desperately to preserve their children’s connection to ancestral languages. This reality sharply contrasts with the dominant public narrative suggesting that multilingualism threatens the stability of English-speaking society. While political discourse often portrays minority languages as invasive or dangerous, many immigrant and multilingual families experience the opposite fear: that their children will lose every meaningful connection to linguistic heritage and become entirely absorbed into monolingual English culture. The absence of mainstream attention to this anxiety reveals what Elgin describes as a “reality gap,” a condition in which different social groups use identical words while assigning radically different meanings to them. The conflict surrounding multilingualism therefore reflects not only disagreement about language policy but also disagreement about reality itself. Even the seemingly obvious claim that multilingualism means “knowing more than one language” collapses under scrutiny because there is no universal agreement regarding what it means to know a language. Some definitions emphasize native-like mastery, while others focus merely on functional use. A person capable of conducting conversations, teaching, translating, or surviving within another linguistic environment may still be judged inadequate according to stricter standards of fluency. The debate is not merely academic. Definitions of multilingualism influence educational policy, immigration systems, social integration, funding decisions, and cultural legitimacy. Entire populations may be classified as deficient or successful according to unstable linguistic standards. Language therefore becomes more than communication; it becomes a mechanism through which societies distribute status, belonging, and power.

Elgin demonstrates that multilingualism exists across a broad spectrum of proficiency and experience, making simplistic statistical claims deeply misleading. David Crystal’s definition of multilingualism as the ability to “make use of” more than one language differs radically from dictionary definitions demanding near-equal fluency in multiple tongues. Very few individuals possess identical mastery across all their languages, particularly as the number of languages increases. Many multilinguals function unevenly, reading and writing one language fluently while using another primarily in conversation or within limited social settings. This complexity becomes especially visible when comparing childhood and adult language acquisition. Elgin contrasts her former husband’s native bilingualism in French and English—acquired naturally within an

international diplomatic environment—with her own later acquisition of French through formal education. Although capable of communication and professional use, she remains marked by accent variation, grammatical uncertainty, and conscious self-correction. Yet functional competence still allows participation within French-speaking environments. Such examples expose the inadequacy of rigid distinctions between “true” bilingualism and partial multilingualism. Human linguistic reality rarely conforms to idealized categories of perfect fluency. Instead, multilingual existence consists of layered competencies shaped by context, opportunity, memory, identity, and social necessity. The question “How many languages does a person know?” therefore conceals deeper questions regarding how languages are lived, embodied, and socially recognized. Multilingualism becomes not a static possession but a dynamic negotiation between linguistic systems and cultural worlds. This ambiguity contributes to the contradictory attitudes surrounding multilingualism within American society. One perspective celebrates multilingual ability as intellectual enrichment, cultural expansion, and access to multiple worldviews. Speaking several languages appears sophisticated, cosmopolitan, and economically advantageous. Historically, this ideal often belonged to privileged social classes who could afford tutors, travel, and classical education. A second perspective treats multilingualism as a transitional inconvenience that must eventually disappear through assimilation into English monolingualism. From this view, maintaining other languages threatens academic achievement, social integration, and economic mobility. Finally, an older and harsher prejudice interprets multilingualism itself as deficiency, associating minority languages or nonstandard dialects with intellectual inferiority and social backwardness. Although such attitudes may now appear softened, they continue shaping educational tracking systems, public policy, and social judgment. The multilingual individual thus occupies an unstable social position oscillating between admiration and suspicion.

The text ultimately argues that understanding multilingualism requires abandoning simplistic assumptions about language, identity, and social belonging. Elgin introduces several essential concepts demonstrating the complexity of linguistic life. The distinction between dialect and language itself proves unstable because dialects become recognized as languages largely through social and political perception rather than purely linguistic criteria. Terms such as native language, pidgin, creole, variety, register, diglossia, and code switching reveal that language exists not as a fixed object but as a constantly shifting system shaped by history, context, and power relations. Native language, often imagined romantically as one’s “mother tongue,” may itself disappear through migration, assimilation, or early exposure to dominant languages. Pidgins and creoles emerge through intercultural contact and demonstrate humanity’s capacity to create entirely new linguistic systems under conditions of necessity and exchange. Registers reveal that individuals alter speech according to social setting, while code switching shows that multilingual speakers move fluidly between linguistic identities depending upon context. Such practices are not signs of confusion but sophisticated forms of communicative adaptability. Yet societies frequently misunderstand these linguistic realities because language remains deeply entangled with nationalism, class structures, cultural hierarchy, and fears of social fragmentation. The absence of coherent language policy, particularly in the United States, reflects this uncertainty. Decisions regarding multilingual education, language preservation, and linguistic rights are often driven by political emotion rather than informed understanding. Elgin therefore presents multilingualism as one of the defining tensions of modern global society. As cultures become increasingly interconnected, human beings must decide whether linguistic diversity represents a burden obstructing unity or an essential dimension of human experience worth preserving. Language is not merely a technical skill but a structure through which individuals perceive the world, construct

identity, and negotiate belonging. To understand multilingualism is therefore to confront the larger question of how humanity wishes to organize coexistence within an increasingly interconnected yet culturally fragmented world.

Elgin, S.H. (2000) The Language Imperative. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing.

The Vanishing Tongue: Culture, Memory, and the Fate of Human Identity

According to Suzette Haden Elgin in “The Link Between Language and Culture,” language is far more than a neutral instrument of communication because it functions as one of the primary vessels through which cultures preserve memory, identity, and collective existence. Every human community possesses both a culture and a language, yet the relationship between the two remains deeply contested. Culture encompasses the totality of how a people live: how they eat, work, worship, raise children, express emotion, create art, resolve conflict, and imagine the world. Language does not merely accompany these practices but permeates them, shaping how experiences are categorized, remembered, and transmitted across generations. This raises a profound philosophical question: is language simply one cultural element among many, comparable to clothing or music, or is it inseparable from culture itself? Many communities fear that linguistic change or extinction threatens the survival of the culture bound to that language. Such anxieties become particularly visible in societies attempting to defend linguistic purity against external influence. France, for example, has developed elaborate institutions dedicated to regulating vocabulary and resisting the growing influence of American English, perceiving linguistic contamination as cultural erosion. Similar protective movements appear elsewhere, from Quebec’s debates over English signage to Lithuanian efforts to police language use in public space. These struggles reveal that language carries symbolic significance extending beyond communication into questions of sovereignty, memory, and identity. Unlike ordinary social customs, language structures the conceptual world through which a community interprets existence itself. This is why many indigenous peoples regard language loss not merely as practical inconvenience but as existential catastrophe. Native American communities in particular often fear that the extinction of their languages would result in the disappearance of cultural knowledge accumulated over centuries. The death of a language therefore appears as the destruction of an intellectual ecosystem, comparable to the extinction of a species. Embedded within vocabulary, grammar, oral tradition, and metaphor are unique forms of ecological understanding, social organization, spirituality, and historical memory that cannot always be translated into dominant languages without severe loss. Language thus becomes a repository of civilization itself.

The struggle to preserve linguistic diversity reveals profound contradictions within modern societies regarding assimilation, nationalism, and cultural survival. In mainstream American culture, immigrant languages have historically been expected to disappear through the assimilative force of the “melting pot,” where English becomes both practical necessity and symbolic marker of national belonging. Television, education systems, and economic pressures accelerate this process by rewarding linguistic conformity and marginalizing minority tongues. Yet attitudes toward multilingualism remain sharply divided. Some regard the preservation of minority languages as an ethical imperative because every language embodies irreplaceable intellectual and cultural wealth. Linguist Ken Hale famously compared language extinction to ecological disaster, suggesting that humanity loses entire systems of thought whenever a language disappears. Others adopt the opposite perspective, arguing that maintaining multiple languages hinders social integration, weakens national unity, and obstructs economic opportunity. From this viewpoint,

bilingual education and language preservation appear inefficient luxuries that prevent immigrants from fully participating within dominant society. A third position rejects the assumption that language and culture are inseparable altogether, claiming that cultural identity can survive even if ancestral languages vanish. According to this argument, customs, values, behaviors, and communal memory may persist independently of linguistic continuity. Finally, there exists a widespread indifference toward language loss, an attitude Elgin characterizes as a form of serene ignorance in which people dismiss the disappearance of other languages as irrelevant so long as their own language remains secure. These conflicting positions reveal that debates over multilingualism are fundamentally debates over the meaning of identity itself. Is culture reducible to practical social behavior, or does language provide the cognitive structure through which culture remains intelligible? The answer carries enormous implications for education, immigration, indigenous rights, and national policy. Programs such as New Zealand's Maori language nests demonstrate that deliberate immersion strategies can successfully revive endangered languages by reconnecting children with ancestral speech communities. Similarly, multicultural educational initiatives sometimes produce unexpected social benefits, as seen in Detroit's Arabic language programs that helped reduce tensions between African-American and Chaldean children by creating shared experiences of linguistic learning. Such examples suggest that language preservation can foster not division but new forms of solidarity and intercultural understanding.

Elgin ultimately portrays the relationship between language and culture as inseparable from the larger tensions of globalization, mobility, and modern identity. In a rapidly interconnected world, societies face increasing pressure to prioritize efficiency, standardization, and communicative uniformity. Calls for English-only policies often emerge from fears that linguistic diversity threatens social cohesion and national unity. Yet the same global environment also intensifies awareness of cultural fragility and the irreversible losses associated with linguistic extinction. The phenomenon of "Global Nomads" or "Third-Culture Kids" further complicates traditional assumptions about language and belonging. These individuals grow up across multiple countries and linguistic environments, often mastering several languages while feeling fully rooted in none of the cultures traditionally associated with them. Their identity becomes transnational, formed through mobility itself rather than through singular national affiliation. Such experiences reveal that multilingualism can generate entirely new forms of cultural existence beyond conventional categories of nationality or ethnicity. At the same time, the disappearance of ancestral languages often renders entire domains of cultural knowledge inaccessible. Oral histories, spiritual practices, ecological understanding, and emotional subtleties embedded within endangered languages may vanish permanently when fluent speakers disappear. Even when fragments survive through translation, much of the original worldview encoded within linguistic structures becomes impossible to fully recover. This raises difficult ethical questions regarding which languages should be preserved, who decides their value, and whether humanity possesses the resources necessary to maintain the world's immense linguistic diversity. Language policy therefore becomes a form of cultural power, determining which histories remain visible and which disappear into silence. Elgin's larger argument suggests that language cannot be reduced to a mere technical system for transmitting information. Every language embodies a distinct mode of perceiving reality and organizing human experience. The preservation or destruction of languages consequently shapes not only communication but the future range of human imagination itself. In defending linguistic diversity, societies are ultimately defending multiple ways of being human against the homogenizing pressures of modernity.

Elgin, S.H. (2000) The Language Imperative. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing.

The Incantation of Diagnosis: Language, Metaphor, and the Medical Construction of Reality

According to Suzette Haden Elgin in “Medicine and the Power of Language,” medicine reveals with extraordinary clarity that language is never a neutral instrument but a force capable of shaping social reality, constructing identity, and altering human behavior through the symbolic authority of naming. Biological processes may exist independently of culture, just as disease exists among animals that possess no linguistic systems for interpreting suffering, yet within human society an illness does not fully exist as a recognized social phenomenon until language gives it a name. Countless medical conditions have historically remained ignored, misunderstood, or dismissed simply because no accepted vocabulary existed through which they could be classified and discussed. Naming transforms private suffering into publicly recognized reality. The moment a condition acquires linguistic legitimacy, it enters institutions, research systems, legal frameworks, pharmaceutical industries, and cultural consciousness. This demonstrates the immense social power embedded within medical language. Critics of linguistic relativity often ridicule the notion that words shape reality by comparing it to belief in magical incantations, yet medicine repeatedly demonstrates that language possesses effects remarkably similar to ritual power. Human beings inhabit worlds structured not only by physical objects but also by abstractions that language allows them to conceptualize. Concepts such as liberty, morality, anxiety, trauma, or illness cannot be physically touched, yet they profoundly influence perception and action. Medical terminology operates within this symbolic domain by transforming experiences into socially meaningful categories. The example of menopause illustrates this process vividly. As a biological transition, menopause is a natural stage of human life, yet the language surrounding it determines whether it is perceived as ordinary maturation or pathological deficiency. When a physician reassures a woman that she is “going through menopause,” the phrase frames the experience as normal and temporary. However, when the same process is renamed “hypoestrogenemia” and described as “estrogen deficiency,” language converts a natural condition into illness. The technical vocabulary carries an aura of scientific authority that reconstructs the individual’s identity from ordinary person into medical patient. This linguistic transformation extends beyond the individual psyche into family expectations, social interactions, institutional intervention, and economic dependency upon healthcare systems. Through naming, medicine acquires the power to redefine existence itself.

Elgin argues that the authority of medical language functions through both technical terminology and metaphorical structures that shape how societies imagine the body, illness, and healing. Metaphors are not decorative linguistic ornaments but foundational frameworks organizing perception and behavior. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s insight that human conceptual systems are fundamentally metaphorical becomes especially significant in medicine because metaphors determine what doctors seek, how patients interpret symptoms, and which forms of treatment appear legitimate. In Western medicine, the metaphor “A DOCTOR IS A MECHANIC” implicitly portrays the human body as a machine composed of malfunctioning parts requiring technical repair. Illness becomes mechanical failure, treatment becomes intervention, and patients become passive systems awaiting correction by experts. This metaphor structures enormous areas of biomedical practice, from surgery to pharmaceutical treatment. By contrast, alternative medical traditions often employ radically different metaphors. In Chinese medicine, the physician resembles a gardener nurturing balance and restoring harmony rather than repairing isolated

defects. Tibetan healer Yeshe Dhonden's pulse diagnosis, described by Richard Selzer, exemplifies a poetic and contemplative approach fundamentally distinct from the clinical precision of Western technological medicine. Such metaphors generate entirely different relationships between practitioner, patient, body, and illness. They influence not only emotional attitudes but also institutional priorities, research funding, healthcare economics, and social expectations regarding healing. A successful metaphor can instantaneously reorganize belief systems far more effectively than prolonged logical argument. Patients guided by one metaphorical system may seek entirely different treatments, adhere differently to medical advice, or interpret symptoms according to incompatible cultural frameworks. Multilingual or multicultural individuals often experience these contradictions directly, navigating multiple medical realities simultaneously. Navajo speakers, Chinese multilinguals, or immigrants moving between traditional and Western healthcare systems may consult several practitioners because each linguistic worldview frames illness differently. This multiplicity demonstrates that medicine is never purely biological. It is inseparable from the symbolic structures through which societies define suffering, normality, and care.

The broader implication of Elgin's argument is that medical language exercises a form of social and institutional power extending far beyond diagnosis itself. Language creates categories that organize behavior, economic relations, moral expectations, and social roles. Once an individual receives a diagnosis, they enter what sociology often describes as the "sick role," acquiring specific obligations, permissions, and identities recognized by society. Medical terminology can therefore alter not only self-perception but access to resources, insurance systems, employment opportunities, and family dynamics. The authority of physicians partly derives from their control over specialized linguistic systems incomprehensible to ordinary people. Technical jargon functions almost sacerdotally, distinguishing medical experts from lay populations and reinforcing institutional hierarchy. Elgin's phrase "MDeitySpeak" captures this quasi-religious dimension of medical discourse, where scientific language acquires an aura of unquestionable authority capable of reshaping reality through declaration alone. Different cultures reveal the contingency of these constructions because some societies possess no equivalent term for conditions heavily medicalized elsewhere. Menopause, for example, may not exist linguistically as a pathological category in cultures where aging women are not expected to seek medical intervention for natural biological transitions. Such contrasts expose the extent to which disease categories emerge through cultural interpretation rather than purely biological necessity. The financial consequences are equally profound because linguistic medicalization expands healthcare systems by redefining ordinary life experiences as conditions requiring diagnosis, treatment, and ongoing management. Medicine thus operates not merely through scientific observation but through symbolic production. Words classify, metaphors organize, and diagnoses create realities that individuals must inhabit socially and psychologically. Elgin ultimately demonstrates that language possesses extraordinary power precisely because it mediates the boundary between biology and culture. Human beings do not experience illness as raw biological fact alone but through narratives, metaphors, labels, and expectations that language imposes upon bodily experience. The struggle over medical terminology is therefore also a struggle over authority, identity, and the social meaning of the human body itself.

Elgin, S.H. (2000) The Language Imperative. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing.

The Divided Self: Language and the Multiplication of Identity

According to Suzette Haden Elgin in “Who’s That in There, Anyway?”, multilingualism may reach far beyond communication and cognition into the deepest structure of personal identity itself. The chapter raises a provocative psychiatric and philosophical question: when multilingual individuals switch languages, do they also become different people? For many bilingual and multilingual speakers, this possibility is not an abstract theory but an immediate lived experience. Professor Azade Seyhan suggests that every language carries with it a distinct version of the self, arguing that “in every language you’re someone else.” Similarly, B. K. Frantzis describes how his emotional reactions, patterns of thought, and internal states shifted according to the language through which he processed experience. Elgin herself recalls observing profound personality changes in her first husband whenever he moved between French and English, transformations so abrupt that they appeared almost uncanny. Such experiences challenge the conventional assumption that identity is stable and merely expressed through language. Instead, they imply that language may actively organize personality, emotion, and perception from within. Responses collected through questionnaires reveal a dramatic split among multilingual speakers. Some insist unequivocally that each language unlocks a distinct self, while others dismiss the notion entirely as absurd. This sharp division suggests that linguistic identity may not operate uniformly across all individuals. Some multilinguals feel emotionally transformed by linguistic transition, whereas others experience language as a purely technical shift without psychological consequence. The disagreement itself becomes philosophically significant because it suggests that human consciousness may not be structured identically across populations. Language, rather than functioning merely as a tool external to the self, may in some individuals become woven directly into the architecture of subjective experience. The multilingual person may therefore inhabit not a singular unified identity but multiple partially overlapping selves activated through different linguistic systems. Each language carries with it distinct emotional histories, social expectations, memories, and symbolic associations accumulated through lived experience. To change language is thus potentially to alter the emotional atmosphere within which thought itself occurs.

Clinical research in psychotherapy and psycholinguistics deepens this possibility by demonstrating that bilingual individuals often display significantly different emotional responses depending on which language they are using. RoseMarie Perez Foster’s work on “The Bilingual Self” argues that multilingual speakers possess not simply two vocabularies but two systems of symbolic meaning and self-experience emerging from distinct developmental contexts. Every language acquired becomes attached to specific emotional environments, family structures, cultural expectations, and patterns of social interaction. A multilingual individual may therefore access different memories, emotional reflexes, and modes of self-expression depending upon the language activated at a given moment. Psychological testing reveals that bilingual patients frequently provide divergent responses when assessed separately in each language. In some therapeutic contexts, switching languages becomes essential because certain emotional realities appear accessible only through one linguistic code rather than another. This phenomenon suggests that language does not merely label preexisting experiences but structures the pathways through which experiences become emotionally intelligible. Certain traumas, desires, fears, or forms of intimacy may exist more vividly in one language because that language was originally connected to the developmental conditions in which those emotions emerged. Therapy itself therefore becomes linguistically contingent. Addressing a patient exclusively through one language may fail to reach dimensions of personality embedded within another symbolic system. The multilingual self appears layered rather than singular, distributed across multiple linguistic realities that cannot always be fully translated into one another. This fragmentation complicates traditional

assumptions regarding coherent identity because the self may not exist independently of language but instead emerge through linguistic mediation. Every language constructs different emotional textures, cultural norms, and possibilities of expression. The bilingual individual therefore navigates overlapping worlds of meaning whose boundaries shape perception and behavior in subtle yet profound ways. Identity becomes dialogical rather than unified, existing between languages rather than entirely within any single one.

Psycholinguistic experiments discussed by Elgin further suggest that language may fundamentally alter perception itself, dividing human cognition into different categories regarding the relationship between sensory reality and linguistic expectation. In one experiment, participants listening to manipulated recordings divided sharply between those who reported exactly what they heard and those whose linguistic expectations overrode the altered sensory input. Ruth S. Day's research similarly distinguished between "stimulus-bound" individuals governed primarily by direct sensory information and "language-bound" individuals whose perception is strongly shaped by the structures and assumptions embedded within language. Elgin tentatively proposes that these distinctions may explain why some multilingual speakers experience different personalities in different languages while others do not. For language-bound individuals, linguistic systems profoundly organize perception, emotion, and identity. Different languages may therefore produce genuinely distinct modes of being because each language carries unique conceptual categories, emotional associations, and cultural expectations. By contrast, stimulus-bound individuals remain anchored primarily to external sensory reality rather than linguistic mediation, experiencing less dramatic psychological transformation during language switching. If this hypothesis proves accurate, its implications extend far beyond academic linguistics into medicine, psychotherapy, education, and social interaction. A multilingual patient might respond differently to treatment depending upon which linguistic self is being addressed. Communication failures could emerge not from inadequate translation but from the inability to access the appropriate emotional and symbolic framework associated with a particular language. The notion of a singular stable identity becomes increasingly uncertain. Human beings may not possess one unified self hidden beneath language but rather multiple selves partially constituted through language itself. Elgin's discussion ultimately revives the broader debate surrounding linguistic relativity by suggesting that language may shape not only thought but the very structure of personhood. The multilingual individual becomes evidence that consciousness is not fixed but dynamically reorganized through symbolic systems. Every language opens a different emotional landscape, a different rhythm of memory, and potentially a different version of the human self. In this sense, multilingualism reveals that identity is less a permanent essence than an ongoing negotiation between the languages through which reality becomes imaginable.

Elgin, S.H. (2000) The Language Imperative. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing.

The Commerce of Ambiguity: Language as Corporate Strategy

According to Suzette Haden Elgin in "Business and the Power of Language," language in the commercial world functions not merely as a neutral medium of exchange but as a strategic instrument for shaping power, obscuring responsibility, and controlling perception. Business transactions appear on the surface to operate according to ideals of fairness, honesty, and mutual agreement. In the theoretical model of Standard American Mainstream English, a seller accurately describes a product or service, a buyer agrees upon a reasonable price, terms are clarified, and both parties honor their commitments transparently. Yet Elgin argues that the reality of modern business

departs dramatically from this idealized fantasy. Beneath the language of cooperation lies a system driven overwhelmingly by profit, competition, and strategic manipulation. Business culture in the United States is organized around a dual metaphor: BUSINESS IS FOOTBALL and BUSINESS IS COMBAT. Commerce becomes a regulated battlefield where success depends not merely on honesty or efficiency but on tactical advantage, concealment, and the ability to manipulate rules without appearing to violate them. English, according to Elgin, has evolved into an extraordinarily effective language for this environment because its grammatical and rhetorical structures allow speakers to evade direct accountability while maintaining the appearance of legitimacy. One of the clearest examples is the use of what she calls the “Passive Exonerative,” where responsibility disappears through passive constructions such as “Mistakes were made” or “Oil was spilled.” Such phrases erase agency and transform deliberate actions into abstract events detached from identifiable actors. This linguistic flexibility allows corporations and institutions to protect themselves from blame while preserving the illusion of transparency. Language thus becomes a shield that masks power relations beneath technical neutrality. The commercial world increasingly depends not on truthfulness in the moral sense but on the strategic management of interpretation. Business language is therefore less a vehicle of communication than a mechanism for organizing ambiguity in ways favorable to institutional interests.

Elgin further argues that English possesses structural advantages that have helped establish it as the dominant language of international commerce. One of its greatest strengths lies in its capacity for presupposition, whereby speakers can embed assumptions within statements without explicitly defending them. Phrases such as “technology-enhanced” or “innovative solutions” quietly impose positive evaluations without requiring evidence or explanation. Listeners absorb these assumptions unconsciously because the grammatical structure encourages acceptance rather than scrutiny. This capacity for stacking presuppositions allows corporations to construct persuasive narratives efficiently, reducing the need for lengthy justification while subtly directing interpretation. Equally significant is the absence in English of obligatory evidential markers. Unlike languages such as Aymara, which require speakers to indicate the source of their information, English permits claims to circulate without specifying how knowledge was obtained. This creates extraordinary flexibility in negotiation, advertising, and public relations because assertions can be presented authoritatively without exposing their epistemological foundations. The language also contains an enormous vocabulary filled with nuanced synonyms, enabling speakers to select words carrying favorable connotations while avoiding emotionally dangerous or legally compromising implications. Through lexical choice alone, corporations can reframe layoffs as “downsizing,” environmental destruction as “resource management,” or economic exploitation as “market efficiency.” English additionally absorbs vocabulary from other languages with remarkable ease, continuously expanding its expressive range while adapting to technological and economic transformations. Its writing system contributes further advantages because written English conveys relatively little information regarding intonation, emotional tone, or interpersonal nuance. Contracts and formal agreements therefore appear emotionally neutral, allowing ambiguity and deniability to persist beneath apparently objective language. What remains unwritten becomes as important as what is explicitly stated. Elgin demonstrates that the power of English in business derives not from inherent superiority but from its extraordinary adaptability to systems of negotiation, persuasion, and strategic ambiguity. The language supports an economic culture where perception management often matters more than sincerity, and where successful communication depends upon controlling interpretation rather than achieving mutual understanding.

The relationship between language and business becomes even more complex when transactions occur across cultural boundaries, because concepts assumed to be universal often conceal radically different meanings. Elgin begins with the Chinese concept of *guanxi*, a network of relationships grounded in trust, ancestry, obligation, and long-term reciprocity. In this framework, written contracts are less important than demonstrated commitment and social reliability. American business culture, by contrast, is deeply structured by the metaphor *TIME IS MONEY*, emphasizing punctuality, efficiency, schedules, and quantifiable productivity. Meetings are expected to begin and end precisely according to predetermined timetables, whereas in many cultures time functions more flexibly as a relational rather than mechanistic concept. These differing assumptions produce misunderstandings even when all participants speak fluent English. The words themselves may appear shared, but the cultural meanings underlying them diverge dramatically. Ethical concepts such as fairness, honesty, obligation, or professionalism similarly vary across societies despite being expressed through identical vocabulary. Elgin warns that businesspeople often assume mutual understanding merely because negotiations occur in the same language, overlooking the reality that cultural frameworks shape interpretation at every level. A Danish exporter and an Egyptian importer may speak grammatically correct English while simultaneously attaching incompatible assumptions to key terms and expectations. In such contexts, language becomes a site of constant negotiation where meanings are constructed provisionally rather than fixed absolutely. The dominance of English in international business therefore does not eliminate misunderstanding; instead, it often conceals it beneath a false appearance of communicative clarity. Elgin ultimately reveals that language is not simply an accessory to economic systems but one of their foundational technologies of power. Through grammar, metaphor, vocabulary, and cultural presupposition, language organizes commercial reality itself. The global marketplace depends not merely upon goods, services, and contracts but upon linguistic structures capable of shaping trust, concealing responsibility, manipulating interpretation, and coordinating systems of power across vast cultural distances. In this sense, business language becomes one of the defining mechanisms through which modern economic life sustains itself.

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The Architecture of Silence: Laadan and the Politics of Universal Language

According to Suzette Haden Elgin in “The Case of Laadan,” constructed languages are never merely technical inventions designed to facilitate communication; they are philosophical experiments that expose the hidden assumptions embedded within natural languages and the social realities those languages sustain. In the 1980s, Elgin created Laadan not primarily as an International Auxiliary Language like Esperanto, but as an experimental linguistic system intended to test the hypothesis that Indo-European languages, particularly English, encode male-centered patterns of perception and communication. Laadan therefore emerged as both a linguistic and political intervention. Unlike English, where ambiguity often allows speakers to conceal responsibility, uncertainty, or emotional intention, Laadan was deliberately structured to force greater precision regarding the source and emotional character of statements. Built directly into its grammar were markers indicating whether information came from direct observation, hearsay, inference, dream, emotion, or speculation. Such features fundamentally altered the relationship between speaker and truth because they prevented individuals from masking uncertainty beneath grammatically neutral assertions. In English, one may simply make a claim without revealing how it was acquired, thereby allowing authority and plausibility to substitute for evidence. Laadan challenged this structure by embedding epistemological transparency into everyday

communication itself. Elgin's experiment thus revealed that language is not simply a passive mirror reflecting thought but an active architecture organizing what speakers are encouraged to notice, suppress, or leave ambiguous. By reconstructing linguistic structures, Laadan attempted to expose how existing languages silently privilege certain forms of experience while marginalizing others. The project therefore operated simultaneously as linguistic invention, feminist critique, and philosophical inquiry into the politics of communication. It asked whether alternative grammatical systems could generate different social realities by altering the habitual frameworks through which human beings process emotion, obligation, knowledge, and interpersonal relations.

Elgin further argues that the vocabulary and conceptual structures of Laadan were designed to articulate emotional and social experiences inadequately represented within Indo-European linguistic traditions. The language included precise distinctions for various forms of love, obligation, relational tension, and emotional undercurrents often flattened or ignored within English discourse. Such lexical precision reflected the belief that what cannot easily be named often remains socially invisible. If a language lacks readily available terms for certain experiences, those experiences become difficult to discuss, validate, or even consciously recognize. Laadan therefore attempted to create a linguistic environment where emotional subtleties, especially those associated with women's lived experiences, would no longer disappear beneath generalized or male-centered categories. This project was deeply connected to the broader theory of linguistic relativity, which proposes that language influences perception and cognition by shaping habitual modes of thought. Elgin did not merely seek to expand vocabulary but to challenge the power structures hidden within linguistic conventions themselves. Indo-European languages often prioritize abstraction, objectification, and adversarial forms of discourse, reflecting broader cultural systems organized around hierarchy and competition. Laadan attempted instead to foreground relational awareness, emotional nuance, and epistemological accountability. Yet the language simultaneously revealed the immense difficulty of constructing alternatives to dominant linguistic systems. Although theoretically neutral compared to national languages like English, Laadan faced barriers even greater than Esperanto because its structures departed radically from familiar Indo-European patterns. Most people resist learning entirely unfamiliar grammatical systems, particularly when those systems challenge deeply internalized communicative habits. A constructed language may appear politically neutral, but neutrality itself offers little practical incentive when compared to the economic, cultural, and institutional advantages attached to dominant natural languages. Laadan thus demonstrated a paradox central to all universal language projects: a language designed to transform consciousness and social relations may be precisely the kind of language most difficult for societies organized around existing power structures to accept. Linguistic systems persist not merely because they facilitate communication but because they reproduce cultural norms, historical identities, and institutional hierarchies.

The broader discussion of universal language ultimately leads Elgin to conclude that the dream of a single global tongue remains both politically problematic and culturally unrealistic. On the surface, a universal language appears attractive because it promises to eliminate translation barriers, reduce misunderstanding, and facilitate global communication. Yet every possible solution carries profound consequences. Adopting an existing natural language such as English would undoubtedly simplify implementation, especially given English's already dominant position in business, science, media, and diplomacy. However, such dominance reinforces geopolitical inequalities and cultural resentment because language is inseparable from power. English spreads globally not simply because of linguistic convenience but because of the economic, military, and cultural influence of English-speaking nations. Many societies therefore

resist its expansion precisely because they perceive it as a vehicle of cultural imperialism threatening local identities and traditions. Constructed languages like Esperanto or Laadan appear more neutral because they do not belong exclusively to any nation-state, yet they confront immense practical obstacles. Most constructed languages borrow heavily from European linguistic structures, unintentionally privileging speakers already familiar with Indo-European patterns while alienating others. Furthermore, individuals rarely feel motivated to invest enormous effort into mastering a language lacking native communities, economic necessity, or emotional attachment. Language is not simply an instrument for exchanging information; it is deeply connected to memory, ancestry, identity, worldview, and collective history. To abandon one's language often feels equivalent to abandoning a portion of oneself. Elgin ultimately argues that linguistic diversity persists because human beings remain unwilling to surrender the symbolic worlds encoded within their native tongues. The fantasy of universal communication collides with the reality that language carries emotional, cultural, and political meanings far beyond practicality. Global communication problems therefore cannot be solved simply through linguistic unification. Any sustainable future must instead accommodate plurality, translation, and coexistence rather than imagining that diversity itself can be eliminated. Laadan, despite its experimental limitations, exposes the profound truth that every language embodies a philosophy of reality. To change language is therefore never merely to change vocabulary; it is to alter the structures through which human beings understand themselves and the world they inhabit.

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The Grammar of Resistance: Laadan and the Politics of Constructed Reality

According to Suzette Haden Elgin in "The Case of Laadan," the creation of an artificial language is never merely a technical exercise in grammar and vocabulary but a philosophical confrontation with the structures of culture, power, and perception embedded within existing linguistic systems. Elgin chose Laadan as her central case study not because she believed it to be inherently superior to other constructed languages, but because she alone could guarantee the accuracy of its history, design, and purpose. Unlike many constructed languages burdened by ownership disputes, ideological myths, or institutional control, Laadan deliberately belonged to no one. This absence of ownership itself reflected a political and philosophical decision, ensuring that no legal authority could prevent others from modifying or extending the language. Whereas Esperanto sought universality through familiarity with Indo-European roots, Laadan emerged from a radically different impulse. Its origins lay partly in science fiction and partly in linguistic theory. Inspired by Douglas Hofstadter's reformulation of Gödel's theorem, Elgin imagined the possibility that certain cultures might be unable to sustain particular linguistic structures without destabilizing themselves. In her novel *Native Tongue*, women linguists therefore construct Laadan as an act of resistance against male-dominated society, designing a language capable of articulating forms of experience excluded or suppressed within patriarchal linguistic systems. The fictional premise carried profound philosophical implications because it suggested that language not only reflects social reality but also actively preserves particular power structures by determining what can be easily expressed, recognized, or validated. If existing languages encode male-centered assumptions, then constructing an alternative language becomes a form of cultural intervention aimed at reorganizing perception itself. Laadan therefore functioned simultaneously as linguistic experiment, feminist critique, and speculative political philosophy. Through it, Elgin explored whether altering the architecture of language might transform the architecture of consciousness and social relations.

The construction of Laadan reveals the immense complexity involved in designing a language intended to avoid the historical and political baggage carried by natural tongues. Rather than borrowing roots from existing European languages as Zamenhof did with Esperanto, Elgin developed Laadan mechanically from foundational linguistic principles. Beginning with the Swadesh list of one hundred essential concepts, she selected seventeen phonemes designed to be pronounceable across diverse language families and established simple combinatory rules for generating syllables. Even this apparently technical process exposed the unavoidable tension between universality and practical limitation. The inclusion of a tonal distinction expanded expressive possibilities but also introduced difficulties comparable to Esperanto's typographic complications. Yet the most significant aspect of Laadan was not its phonological structure but its semantic purpose. Elgin deliberately expanded the language to express emotional and social experiences she believed Indo-European languages inadequately represented. Using the King James Bible as a diagnostic tool, she translated passages into Laadan to identify conceptual gaps, especially concerning women's inner experiences. Traditional narratives surrounding childbirth, suffering, emotional ambivalence, or relational tension often flattened or ignored dimensions of female perception that Laadan sought to render linguistically visible. The resulting vocabulary included terms such as *widazhad*, describing the exhausted impatience of late pregnancy, or *raheena*, referring to a level of incompatibility so profound that understanding becomes impossible. Other words captured forms of betrayal, emotional suppression, or relational manipulation lacking precise equivalents in English. Through such lexical inventions, Laadan demonstrated that every language silently prioritizes certain realities while marginalizing others. What remains unnamed becomes difficult to conceptualize socially and psychologically. The language also eliminated gender distinctions in pronouns, emphasizing that grammatical structures themselves participate in organizing social assumptions about identity and hierarchy. Elgin's work therefore suggested that linguistic neutrality is largely illusory because all languages embody particular historical experiences, cultural values, and distributions of power. Constructing Laadan became an attempt not to create perfection but to expose the hidden ideological assumptions naturalized within dominant linguistic traditions.

Despite its intellectual ambition, Laadan ultimately failed to become an international auxiliary language, a result Elgin presents not as personal disappointment but as evidence of the enormous challenges facing any attempt to redesign human communication. Ironically, the language encountered political controversies precisely because of its association with women's perceptions. Many critics assumed that Laadan was intended exclusively for women, even though countless existing languages privilege masculine perspectives without being restricted to male speakers. This reaction itself illustrated the extent to which linguistic systems are inseparable from political anxieties regarding identity, authority, and social change. Elgin openly acknowledges the imperfections of her creation, emphasizing the practical difficulties of constructing a language while balancing academic work, literary production, and economic survival. Even with advanced linguistic training and decades of experience across multiple language families, the process remained extraordinarily difficult. Her reflections reveal that language construction cannot escape the limitations imposed by human cognition, cultural history, and social expectation. Every attempt to create a neutral or universal language confronts the reality that language is never merely functional. It carries emotional attachments, historical memories, ideological assumptions, and symbolic meanings deeply embedded within collective identity. Laadan therefore serves less as a practical solution to global communication than as a philosophical demonstration of the intimate relationship between language and power. It reveals that linguistic systems shape not only communication but the boundaries of social imagination itself. Certain experiences become easier

to articulate and therefore easier to validate, while others remain obscured beneath lexical absence or grammatical ambiguity. Elgin's experiment ultimately exposes the illusion that language can ever be entirely neutral or politically innocent. Every vocabulary, every grammatical rule, and every metaphor participates in structuring reality according to particular cultural assumptions. Laadan's true significance lies not in whether it succeeded as an auxiliary language but in the questions it forced readers and linguists to confront regarding whose experiences existing languages privilege, whose realities remain unnamed, and whether transforming language might also transform the possibilities of human consciousness and social life.

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The Neural Theatre of Speech: Language, Brain, and the Architecture of Human Thought

According to Suzette Haden Elgin in "Language and the Brain," the relationship between language and human cognition occupies one of the most fascinating yet uncertain territories in modern intellectual inquiry. Human beings appear uniquely equipped with a species-specific capacity for language acquisition, a phenomenon often associated with Noam Chomsky's concept of the Language Acquisition Device, or LAD. Yet Elgin emphasizes that this biological potential alone cannot explain the emergence of language. Echoing Oliver Sacks, she argues that innate capacity requires the support of a Language Acquisition Support System, or LASS—a social environment composed of speakers who nurture, encourage, and sustain linguistic interaction. Language therefore emerges through the convergence of biological predisposition and social immersion. Neither nature nor nurture alone is sufficient. This duality immediately complicates simplistic accounts of human speech because it suggests that language exists simultaneously as physiological structure and cultural process. Elgin further warns that discussions of the brain are frequently obscured by speculative metaphor disguised as scientific certainty. Much of the literature surrounding language acquisition relies upon conceptual models rather than directly observable realities. Researchers describe neural pathways, connection systems, switches, and processing mechanisms using metaphors borrowed from computing or engineering because the brain itself remains resistant to complete empirical transparency. Lakoff and Johnson's argument that human beings can only discuss the mind metaphorically becomes especially important here. Terms such as "storage," "processing," or "activation" do not literally describe what occurs within the brain but instead provide symbolic approximations that allow scientists to conceptualize otherwise inaccessible phenomena. Elgin therefore adopts a cautious position, acknowledging both the significance of neuroscience and the limits of current understanding. Even advanced technologies such as functional magnetic resonance imaging reveal only patterns of activity rather than definitive explanations of consciousness or language itself. Human beings continue to stand before the mystery of language much as ancient civilizations stood before the stars: equipped with increasingly sophisticated instruments yet still dependent upon metaphor to describe realities only partially understood.

The process through which infants acquire language reveals the extraordinary complexity of this interaction between biology and environment. Children appear capable of mastering linguistic systems with remarkable speed and apparent effortless despite the immense structural complexity underlying human language. Chomsky's theory of universal grammar proposes that infants are born with innate specifications enabling them to narrow infinite linguistic possibilities into the specific grammatical structures present within their environment. Elgin describes this

process metaphorically as the activation of neural “switches,” where repeated exposure strengthens certain pathways while unused possibilities gradually fade. A child raised within a multilingual environment may therefore develop multiple native linguistic systems simultaneously, integrating them into a unified cognitive structure during early developmental stages. By contrast, adults learning additional languages later in life often experience significantly greater difficulty because neural flexibility diminishes over time. Neuroimaging studies suggest that early multilingual acquisition tends to produce overlapping or unified neural representations, whereas later language learning activates more separate regions, particularly within areas associated with speech production such as Broca’s area. Although Elgin stresses that these studies remain tentative and based on limited samples, they nonetheless reinforce the broader idea that early language acquisition differs fundamentally from adult language learning. Childhood represents a period of extraordinary neurological plasticity during which the brain rapidly reorganizes itself in response to linguistic input. Adults, however, often approach new languages analytically and consciously, relying more heavily upon explicit learning strategies rather than intuitive immersion. This distinction illuminates the profound relationship between developmental timing and cognitive flexibility. The multilingual child does not simply memorize vocabulary but internalizes entire systems of perception, rhythm, syntax, and social meaning at a stage when neural structures remain highly adaptable. Language acquisition therefore appears not merely as the accumulation of information but as a process through which the brain itself becomes shaped by linguistic interaction. Every language learned during early development participates in organizing cognitive architecture, influencing how reality is categorized, interpreted, and emotionally experienced.

Elgin ultimately presents language acquisition as one of the clearest examples of the inseparable relationship between biological inheritance and cultural environment. Human beings may possess innate neurological capacities making language possible, yet these capacities remain dormant without immersion within speaking communities. The brain does not function as an isolated computational machine generating language independently of society; rather, linguistic ability emerges through continuous interaction between neural potential and social experience. This perspective challenges purely biological determinism as well as simplistic environmentalism. Language becomes both natural and cultural, simultaneously encoded within human physiology and dependent upon collective human activity. Yet despite decades of research, the precise physiological basis of the Language Acquisition Device remains elusive. Scientists continue to rely heavily upon metaphorical models such as neural nets, pathways, and activation systems because the direct mechanisms underlying consciousness and language remain beyond complete comprehension. Elgin’s caution regarding scientific overconfidence is therefore significant. Discussions of the brain often create an illusion of certainty by employing technical vocabulary that conceals the provisional nature of current knowledge. Functional imaging technologies may reveal patterns correlated with linguistic activity, but they do not yet explain how meaning itself arises from biological matter. The mystery of language therefore persists at the intersection of neuroscience, philosophy, psychology, and linguistics. Human speech appears simultaneously material and immaterial: grounded in physical neural systems yet capable of generating abstraction, symbolism, metaphor, and self-consciousness. The multilingual brain further complicates these questions because it demonstrates that human cognition can sustain multiple linguistic realities within a single consciousness. Different languages may activate distinct emotional responses, perceptual habits, and conceptual frameworks, suggesting that language shapes not merely communication but modes of being itself. Elgin’s discussion ultimately portrays language acquisition as one of humanity’s most astonishing achievements—a process through which biology, culture, memory, and imagination converge to produce the symbolic systems that

define human civilization. The study of language and the brain therefore reveals not only how humans speak but how they become human through speech itself.

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The Forgotten Miracle: Language, Power, and the Fate of Human Consciousness

According to Suzette Haden Elgin in the conclusion of *The Language Imperative*, modern society consistently underestimates the immense power, complexity, and civilizational importance of language precisely because speech appears ordinary and universally accessible. Human beings admire physicists, surgeons, astronomers, and engineers because their disciplines demand years of visible technical struggle and specialized expertise. Language, however, is mastered by small children with astonishing ease, creating the illusion that it is simple, automatic, and insignificant. Because everyone speaks, society mistakes linguistic ability for something trivial rather than recognizing it as one of humanity's greatest intellectual achievements. Elgin argues that if language acquisition resembled brain surgery or advanced mathematics in its visible difficulty, human civilization would treat linguistics with reverence equal to that granted to the natural sciences. Instead, language is routinely dismissed as "just talk," reduced to a transparent medium carrying information rather than acknowledged as the very structure through which reality, culture, identity, and social organization become possible. This trivialization has dangerous consequences because societies continue making profound political and educational decisions regarding language based on ignorance, prejudice, convenience, and emotional reaction rather than informed linguistic understanding. Throughout the work, Elgin seeks to restore a sense of wonder toward language by revealing that speaking, understanding, and especially mastering multiple languages constitute extraordinary cognitive capacities deserving admiration rather than indifference. Language is not merely a tool added onto human existence but one of the foundational conditions of consciousness itself. Through language, human beings construct memory, negotiate identity, preserve culture, formulate abstractions, and transmit civilization across generations. To misunderstand language is therefore to misunderstand the human condition. Elgin's argument ultimately transforms linguistics from a specialized academic discipline into a central field for understanding humanity's future, warning that continued negligence regarding language policy and linguistic diversity may produce irreversible cultural and intellectual consequences.

A central concern running through Elgin's conclusion is the accelerating disappearance of linguistic diversity and the complacency with which modern societies confront this loss. Contrary to widespread fears regarding threats posed to English within the United States, Elgin argues that the true endangered entities are the countless minority and immigrant languages steadily vanishing beneath the overwhelming dominance of English. Every lost language represents far more than the disappearance of vocabulary or grammar. It signifies the extinction of unique systems of memory, metaphor, ecological knowledge, emotional expression, historical experience, and cultural perception accumulated over centuries. Language carries within it entire worlds of understanding inaccessible through direct translation because every linguistic system organizes reality differently. When a language disappears, humanity loses not merely alternative words for familiar objects but entire modes of perceiving existence. Elgin therefore frames linguistic extinction as a crisis comparable to ecological destruction. Just as biodiversity enriches and stabilizes natural ecosystems, linguistic diversity preserves the multiplicity of human consciousness itself. The danger is not simply homogenization of communication but homogenization of thought. A world reduced to one dominant language risks narrowing the range of perspectives through which reality

can be interpreted. Elgin also critiques educational systems that delay foreign language instruction until after the developmental periods during which language learning occurs most naturally and effectively. By postponing multilingual education, societies waste critical neurological opportunities while reinforcing monolingual assumptions that impoverish intellectual flexibility. She therefore advocates integrating linguistics into general education as fundamentally as chemistry or mathematics because understanding language is essential for understanding cognition, culture, and social power. The neglect of linguistic education reflects a broader cultural blindness toward the significance of communication itself. Human beings increasingly inhabit globalized environments requiring intercultural understanding, yet educational systems continue treating language learning as optional enrichment rather than as a central human necessity. Elgin warns that such complacency may ultimately leave societies intellectually and culturally impoverished, unable to preserve the plurality of perspectives necessary for a complex and interconnected world.

The broader philosophical significance of Elgin's conclusion lies in its insistence that language must be understood not as passive communication but as an active force shaping human civilization at every level. Throughout history, societies have underestimated language precisely because it operates continuously and invisibly within everyday life. Yet language structures laws, religions, sciences, economies, emotional relationships, political systems, and collective identities. Every institution of civilization depends upon symbolic systems capable of organizing meaning across generations. To dismiss language as ordinary conversation is therefore to ignore the infrastructure underlying all human knowledge and social organization. Elgin repeatedly emphasizes that the power of language extends beyond information exchange into the formation of consciousness itself. Through language, human beings classify reality, define morality, construct narratives, and negotiate social hierarchies. Linguistic systems influence what can be easily imagined, remembered, or emotionally articulated. The preservation of linguistic diversity thus becomes inseparable from the preservation of intellectual diversity. A civilization that loses sensitivity to language risks becoming vulnerable to manipulation, simplification, and ideological rigidity because it no longer recognizes how profoundly communication shapes perception. Elgin's conclusion therefore functions as both warning and appeal. Humanity stands at a historical crossroads where globalization, technological standardization, and economic pressure increasingly favor linguistic uniformity. Yet abandoning linguistic plurality for convenience may carry consequences far beyond communication efficiency. It may gradually erode humanity's capacity for alternative modes of thought, emotional nuance, and cultural imagination. To value language properly is not merely to preserve traditions nostalgically but to defend the cognitive richness upon which human adaptability and creativity depend. Elgin ultimately insists that language is among humanity's greatest inheritances and most dangerous powers. Societies that fail to recognize its significance proceed blindly toward cultural impoverishment, educational failure, and intellectual narrowing. The future of humanity therefore depends not only upon technological advancement or economic development but also upon whether civilization learns to respect, preserve, and cultivate the profound miracle of language itself.

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3. PROPAGANDA STATE

The Machinery of Fear: The Empire of Managed Consent

Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor in their article *The Revival of the Propaganda State: US Propaganda at Home and Abroad since 9/11* examine how the attacks of September 11 transformed the relationship between democracy, information, and state power, creating a political climate in which propaganda re-emerged as a central mechanism of governance and international influence. The catastrophe of 9/11 did not simply provoke military retaliation; it generated an atmosphere of fear that altered the psychological structure of political communication itself. Within moments of collective shock, dissent became associated with disloyalty, while obedience was reframed as patriotism. The near unanimous political support for expansive military action revealed how quickly democratic institutions could surrender critical judgment under the pressure of national trauma. The symbolic isolation of dissenting voices demonstrated that modern propaganda no longer depends solely upon coercion, but upon emotional synchronization, where fear and collective anxiety produce voluntary conformity. Under such conditions, language itself becomes militarized. Political discourse abandons complexity and transforms into moral absolutism divided between loyalty and treason, civilization and barbarism, good and evil. The declaration that nations were either “with us or against us” reduced geopolitical realities into simplified emotional narratives capable of mobilizing mass support while suppressing skepticism. In this environment, the state acquires the ability to present extraordinary measures as necessary acts of survival. Propaganda therefore functions not merely as persuasion, but as the reconstruction of perception itself, reorganizing public consciousness around permanent insecurity and endless emergency. The modern propaganda state no longer resembles the openly authoritarian systems of the twentieth century because it operates through media repetition, emotional symbolism, and strategic framing disguised as democratic communication. The spectacle of freedom becomes inseparable from the management of opinion, while public debate gradually narrows into acceptable ideological boundaries established by political and media elites.

The article further demonstrates that censorship within democratic societies rarely appears in openly brutal forms, but instead emerges through subtle mechanisms of omission, repetition, selective visibility, and institutional self-censorship. Following 9/11, the rhetoric of national security justified increasing secrecy and expanded executive authority while simultaneously weakening traditions of transparency and public accountability. Information management became essential to maintaining support for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, particularly when official claims regarding weapons of mass destruction and links between Saddam Hussein and terrorism required constant reinforcement despite weak evidence. The media environment increasingly depended upon unnamed intelligence sources, carefully managed press briefings, and the repetition of identical narratives across corporate news organizations. Such practices transformed journalism into an extension of strategic communication rather than an independent force of democratic scrutiny. The suppression of dissenting interpretations created the illusion of consensus, while journalists themselves often internalized the limits imposed by patriotic expectation and commercial pressure. The dismissal of figures who challenged dominant narratives revealed how modern democracies discipline deviation without formal censorship laws. This condition reflects Walter Lippmann’s warning that the interruption of free information flow weakens the possibility of independent judgment. The public becomes trapped within a carefully engineered symbolic reality where alternatives appear irrational or dangerous. At the same time, propaganda increasingly extends beyond domestic audiences into the international sphere through projects of public diplomacy intended to restore legitimacy abroad. Channels such as Al Hurrah Television and Radio Sawa attempted to export an image of American freedom while countering

the influence of networks such as Al Jazeera. Yet these initiatives suffered from a contradiction at the heart of modern propaganda: credibility cannot be manufactured through state sponsorship alone. When political actions contradict proclaimed democratic ideals, communication loses persuasive power regardless of technological sophistication or financial investment. Propaganda therefore collapses when the distance between rhetoric and reality becomes too visible to conceal.

Snow and Taylor ultimately portray the post-9/11 era as a period in which democratic societies increasingly adopted the communicative logic of permanent war. Public diplomacy, soft power, and strategic messaging became subordinate to military priorities, producing an international image shaped less by ideals of liberty than by spectacles of surveillance, invasion, and coercive power. The decline of traditional public diplomacy after the Cold War created an informational vacuum later filled by global media networks capable of challenging official narratives and exposing contradictions within Western foreign policy. Independent reporting, digital communication, and transnational broadcasting weakened the monopoly once held by dominant state institutions over international perception. As a result, propaganda entered a crisis of legitimacy. The state could still manufacture narratives domestically through fear and repetition, yet global audiences increasingly compared official rhetoric with visual evidence of war, destruction, and political inconsistency. This produced a profound erosion of credibility that weakened America's moral authority abroad. The article suggests that democratic propaganda can only survive if it preserves at least the appearance of truthfulness, transparency, and ethical consistency. Once propaganda abandons these foundations entirely, it reveals itself not as communication but as manipulation stripped of legitimacy. The struggle over information after 9/11 therefore reflects a deeper philosophical conflict concerning the nature of democracy itself. A society that sacrifices transparency for security risks transforming freedom into spectacle and citizenship into passive spectatorship. In such a world, media ceases to function as a forum for rational debate and instead becomes an instrument for the administration of perception, emotional management, and ideological containment. The propaganda state is thus not merely a political structure but a psychological order sustained through continuous symbolic warfare, where reality itself becomes unstable beneath the pressure of strategic narratives and manufactured consent.

Snow, N. and Taylor, P.M. (2006) 'The Revival of the Propaganda State: US Propaganda at Home and Abroad since 9/11', International Communication Gazette, 68(5-6), pp. 389-407.

The Theater of Intervention: The Architecture of Manufactured Conflict

Norman Solomon in his book *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death* explores the systematic construction of public consent for war within modern democratic societies, revealing how political power increasingly depends upon the manipulation of language, media narratives, and emotional perception in order to transform military aggression into moral necessity. In democratic systems, war cannot rely solely upon coercion because governments require the appearance of public approval to legitimize military intervention. As a result, the preparation for war begins long before the first missile is launched or the first soldier crosses a border. The true battlefield initially exists within the sphere of communication itself, where public consciousness becomes the primary terrain to be conquered. Political leaders therefore engage in campaigns designed not merely to inform citizens but to emotionally organize them around narratives of fear, righteousness, and patriotic obligation. The state constructs simplified moral frameworks that divide the world into forces of civilization and forces of chaos, allowing complex geopolitical realities to be reduced into emotionally accessible spectacles. Within these spectacles,

hesitation becomes weakness, skepticism becomes disloyalty, and dissent risks association with treason. The rhetoric surrounding war consistently presents intervention as reluctant yet unavoidable, defensive rather than aggressive, humanitarian rather than strategic. Such narratives create the illusion that military violence emerges naturally from moral duty rather than political calculation. The population is encouraged to perceive war not as an extension of power but as a tragic necessity imposed upon the nation by external threats. Through repetition, selective framing, and emotional symbolism, governments cultivate the image of national unity while concealing uncertainty, contradiction, and geopolitical ambition beneath the language of protection and sacrifice.

The historical examples examined by Solomon demonstrate that the architecture of war propaganda remains remarkably consistent across decades despite changing political circumstances. During the intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965, the Johnson administration publicly justified military action through claims of protecting American lives and preventing Communist infiltration, while privately acknowledging the weakness of the evidence supporting such accusations. The fear of another Cuba within the Western Hemisphere became more politically significant than the actual conditions on the ground. This reveals a central characteristic of propaganda within democratic societies: the strategic use of ideological symbols capable of activating collective anxieties regardless of factual precision. The image of Communist expansion functioned less as objective analysis and more as a psychological instrument for mobilizing consent. Similar methods later appeared during the buildup to the invasion of Iraq, where uncertain intelligence and speculative claims regarding weapons of mass destruction were transformed into unquestionable public truths through constant repetition by officials and media institutions. The state does not merely provide information during these periods; it orchestrates perception itself. Official speeches, press conferences, televised reports, and expert commentary converge into a unified communicative system that narrows the boundaries of acceptable interpretation. Media organizations often become extensions of political strategy through their dependence upon government sources, patriotic framing, and commercial incentives tied to spectacle and crisis. The repetition of emotionally charged phrases concerning national security, freedom, and imminent danger gradually replaces critical analysis with symbolic certainty. In this environment, language loses its descriptive function and becomes an instrument for directing emotional response. Facts are rearranged into narratives of inevitability, while contradictions and inconvenient details are concealed beneath moral urgency. The result is the creation of a collective emotional atmosphere in which war appears not only justified but historically unavoidable.

Solomon ultimately portrays the manufacturing of war agendas as part of a broader transformation in the relationship between media, democracy, and state power. Modern warfare increasingly depends upon the management of perception as much as upon military force itself. Governments, intelligence agencies, public relations experts, and corporate media institutions form an interconnected apparatus capable of constructing persuasive realities that shape public consciousness long before independent scrutiny becomes possible. Once the initial narrative establishes itself within public imagination, later revelations exposing exaggeration or fabrication rarely possess the same emotional force as the original spectacle of fear and patriotic mobilization. The first narrative leaves a psychological imprint that continues to justify intervention even after its foundations collapse. This reveals how propaganda functions not primarily through rational persuasion but through emotional conditioning and symbolic repetition. The media's continuous circulation of dramatic images, urgent warnings, and simplified moral binaries creates a shared social perception that discourages skepticism and rewards conformity. Democratic discourse

gradually transforms into performance, where the appearance of consensus becomes more important than genuine debate. Under these conditions, citizens cease to function as critical participants within democracy and instead become spectators of carefully managed political theater. The construction of war agendas therefore reflects a deeper philosophical crisis concerning truth, representation, and power within modern communication systems. War is sustained not only through weapons and armies but through narratives capable of redefining aggression as virtue and transforming manipulation into patriotic necessity. The management of language becomes inseparable from the management of reality itself, while propaganda emerges as the invisible machinery through which modern states normalize violence, organize obedience, and preserve the illusion that public consent remains freely given.

Solomon, N. (2005) War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

The Performance of Honesty: The Ritual of Strategic Deception

Norman Solomon in his book *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death* examines the subtle mechanisms through which political leaders and media institutions construct credibility while simultaneously manipulating public perception, revealing that modern propaganda rarely depends upon crude falsehoods and instead operates through omission, selective emphasis, emotional framing, and calculated ambiguity. The modern state understands that democratic societies maintain a deep psychological attachment to the belief that national leaders fundamentally tell the truth, particularly during moments of war and crisis. This belief forms the invisible foundation upon which military agendas are constructed. Citizens are encouraged to assume that while governments may occasionally make mistakes, they ultimately act with sincerity in matters concerning national security. Yet the historical experiences described by Daniel Ellsberg expose a far more sophisticated reality in which officials cultivate the appearance of openness precisely in order to conceal essential truths. Pentagon figures such as John T. McNaughton mastered the theatrical art of appearing transparent while carefully avoiding direct disclosure. By adopting informal language, feigned simplicity, and conversational ease, officials generated the illusion of authenticity that journalists and citizens often interpreted as honesty itself. The performance of sincerity became more important than factual accuracy. Political communication therefore evolved into a ritual of controlled disclosure where fragments of truth were strategically arranged to create false conclusions without requiring explicit lies. The public rarely encounters pure fabrication; instead, it encounters narratives constructed through selective context, emotional emphasis, and deliberate absence. Such methods prove more effective because they preserve institutional credibility while subtly directing perception toward predetermined conclusions. Propaganda thus functions not by replacing reality entirely, but by reorganizing reality into emotionally persuasive forms that discourage skepticism and reward obedience.

The events surrounding the Office of Strategic Influence after 9/11 further illustrate how democratic propaganda disguises itself through symbolic gestures of accountability while preserving the deeper machinery of manipulation intact. Public outrage over revelations that the Pentagon intended to spread disinformation abroad forced officials to publicly distance themselves from overt deception. The rapid closure of the office created the appearance that democratic institutions had corrected themselves and reaffirmed moral boundaries concerning truthfulness. Yet this symbolic act concealed a more disturbing continuity: the methods themselves remained unchanged even after the institution formally disappeared. Political leaders reassured citizens that

deliberate lying would not occur while simultaneously constructing elaborate narratives about Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction and supposed links to terrorism. Lieutenant Colonel Karen Kwiatkowski later described how intelligence fragments were reorganized into persuasive talking points designed not to inform but to manufacture conviction. Facts were not necessarily invented outright; instead, they were rearranged within narratives that produced entirely misleading impressions. This reflects one of the most powerful characteristics of modern propaganda: the ability to maintain technical truthfulness while generating substantive deception. Officials manipulate emphasis, timing, omission, and framing so effectively that false realities emerge without the need for direct fabrication. A Pentagon official's statement that "we lie by not telling you things" reveals the philosophical core of strategic communication within modern democracies. Silence itself becomes an instrument of manipulation. Information withheld from public view acquires as much political significance as information openly presented. Citizens therefore make decisions within realities carefully structured through absence, emotional repetition, and institutional authority. The state no longer needs to openly censor because the boundaries of perception are shaped through selective visibility and the disciplined circulation of narratives.

Solomon ultimately portrays the relationship between political leadership and media institutions as a mutually reinforcing system that transforms war propaganda into normalized public discourse. Journalists and major news organizations frequently participate in agenda-building not merely because they are deceived, but because dramatic narratives of imminent danger, national destiny, and moral conflict provide compelling spectacles capable of attracting audiences and reinforcing patriotic sentiment. During the buildup to the Iraq War, media outlets repeated questionable intelligence claims with minimal scrutiny, allowing emotionally charged narratives to dominate public consciousness even when contradictory evidence existed. Stories concerning defectors, secret weapons programs, and catastrophic threats circulated repeatedly until uncertainty itself disappeared beneath the force of repetition. The later admissions by institutions such as the New York Times demonstrated not only journalistic failure but the structural dependence of corporate media upon official power. By presenting themselves as victims of misinformation rather than active participants in its dissemination, these organizations avoided confronting their role within the larger propaganda apparatus. The result is a communicative environment where wars appear inevitable long before they begin because the emotional architecture supporting intervention has already been constructed. Citizens are guided toward predetermined conclusions through carefully selected language, symbolic imagery, and orchestrated consensus. Modern propaganda therefore depends less upon authoritarian coercion than upon the management of trust itself. Leaders cultivate the image of reluctant protectors acting under the burden of necessity, while media institutions reinforce the illusion that public debate remains open and objective. Beneath this surface, however, communication becomes increasingly theatrical, transforming democratic discourse into a performance where narratives of fear and patriotism obscure the instability of the underlying evidence. The machinery of war propaganda survives precisely because it rarely presents itself as propaganda at all. Instead, it appears as common sense, national responsibility, and moral clarity, allowing manipulation to operate invisibly beneath the language of truth, security, and democratic duty.

Solomon, N. (2005) War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

The Disguise of Candor: The Machinery of Controlled Perception

Norman Solomon in his book *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death* analyzes the hidden relationship between political rhetoric, media institutions, and public belief, demonstrating how modern governments sustain support for war not through obvious falsehoods but through carefully managed appearances of honesty, selective disclosure, and the strategic organization of perception. The modern democratic state understands that credibility is its most valuable instrument during moments of military escalation. Citizens are far more likely to accept war when they believe their leaders are fundamentally truthful, even if those leaders occasionally conceal sensitive details in the name of national security. For this reason, political communication during wartime increasingly resembles theatrical performance rather than transparent dialogue. Daniel Ellsberg's observations of Pentagon official John T. McNaughton reveal how deception often operates through style, personality, and symbolic gestures rather than direct fabrication. McNaughton cultivated the image of a sincere and uncomplicated public servant, deliberately adopting the speech patterns of an ordinary Midwestern farmer whenever he needed to evade uncomfortable truths. Simplicity itself became a mask concealing manipulation. His apparent openness disarmed journalists because authenticity in tone was mistaken for authenticity in content. Ellsberg later recognized the same pattern in Edward Lansdale, whose cultivated image of harmless informality allowed strategic ambiguity to flourish beneath the appearance of candor. This reveals one of the central paradoxes of modern propaganda: the more natural and unsophisticated authority appears, the easier it becomes to obscure institutional deception. Citizens and reporters alike are psychologically conditioned to trust familiarity, emotional warmth, and conversational honesty, even when these qualities function primarily as instruments of concealment. Propaganda therefore no longer relies solely upon censorship or authoritarian control; it operates through emotional performance and symbolic trust capable of transforming manipulation into credibility.

The controversy surrounding the Pentagon's Office of Strategic Influence after 9/11 exposed how democratic institutions publicly reject overt propaganda while quietly preserving its methods under different names and structures. When revelations emerged that the office intended to spread deceptive information internationally, public criticism forced the administration to publicly distance itself from the project. President Bush reassured citizens that truthfulness remained a guiding principle, while Donald Rumsfeld announced the office's closure as proof that democratic accountability remained intact. Yet this symbolic gesture concealed the continuity of the deeper propaganda apparatus. The closure of a single institution did not end strategic deception because the manipulation of information had already become integrated into the broader political and media culture surrounding the war on terror. Officials continued to circulate alarming narratives concerning Iraq's alleged weapons programs and supposed connections to terrorism, despite the uncertainty and contradictions surrounding much of the intelligence. Lieutenant Colonel Karen Kwiatkowski later described how fragments of genuine information were reorganized into narratives carefully designed to produce fear and certainty within the public imagination. This process reflects the sophisticated character of modern propaganda, where outright lies are often unnecessary because selective truths can generate equally deceptive conclusions. A statement by a Pentagon official that "we lie by not telling you things" reveals the philosophical foundation of strategic communication in democratic societies. Silence itself becomes a political weapon. Information omitted from public discussion acquires immense power because citizens interpret events within realities constructed through absence as much as through disclosure. The state manipulates not only what is said but what remains invisible, controlling emotional interpretation

through omission, repetition, and framing. Under such conditions, public debate appears open while its boundaries are carefully managed beneath the surface.

Solomon ultimately portrays the media not as an external observer of political manipulation but as an essential participant in the construction of war narratives. Major news organizations repeatedly amplified speculative intelligence and dramatic stories concerning Iraqi threats because these narratives aligned with political expectations and generated emotionally compelling spectacles for audiences. Reports concerning defectors, secret weapons, and catastrophic dangers circulated rapidly despite weak evidentiary foundations, while contradictory information received comparatively little attention. The media's appetite for dramatic conflict merged with governmental agenda-building to create an atmosphere in which military intervention appeared both urgent and morally unavoidable. Figures such as Kenneth Pollack reinforced this atmosphere through authoritative language that transformed uncertain geopolitical assumptions into persuasive arguments for invasion. Even after evidence undermined the central justifications for war, institutional self-criticism remained limited and defensive. Internal admissions from the New York Times acknowledged failures in reporting while simultaneously presenting the newspaper as another victim of misinformation rather than an active collaborator in its dissemination. Such responses revealed how deeply embedded propaganda had become within the structures of modern journalism. The press preserved the appearance of independence while functioning as a mechanism for reproducing official narratives. In this environment, the distinction between journalism and strategic communication gradually dissolves. Citizens consume spectacles of certainty rather than processes of investigation, while public opinion is guided toward predetermined conclusions through emotional repetition and symbolic urgency. Modern war propaganda therefore functions through the management of trust itself. Leaders do not need to openly invent reality when they possess the power to selectively arrange fragments of truth into emotionally persuasive narratives. The resulting illusion of transparency becomes more dangerous than direct censorship because it convinces democratic societies that manipulation and freedom can coexist without contradiction. Beneath the language of security, patriotism, and moral duty, communication becomes a form of invisible governance through which fear, repetition, and controlled perception normalize war long before the first act of violence officially begins.

Solomon, N. (2005) War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

The Specter of Tyranny: The Ritual of Manufactured Evil

Norman Solomon in his book *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death* examines how modern political rhetoric transforms international conflicts into simplified moral dramas through the systematic construction of absolute enemies, revealing that the repeated comparison of foreign leaders to Adolf Hitler functions not merely as historical reference but as a powerful psychological instrument for mobilizing public consent for war. Modern democracies require emotional clarity before military intervention can become politically sustainable. Citizens must be persuaded that violence is not only necessary but morally righteous, and this process depends upon the creation of villains whose existence appears to threaten civilization itself. The figure of Hitler occupies a uniquely powerful symbolic position within modern political consciousness because it represents the ultimate historical embodiment of evil, aggression, and genocide. By associating contemporary adversaries with Hitler, political leaders collapse historical complexity into emotionally immediate narratives where negotiation appears cowardly and

military action appears morally unavoidable. The analogy functions through fear, memory, and emotional reflex rather than careful analysis. Once an enemy becomes associated with Nazism, skepticism toward war begins to resemble complicity with evil itself. Historical nuance disappears beneath symbolic urgency. Presidents and policymakers repeatedly invoke the lessons of Munich and appeasement because these references carry enormous emotional force within Western political culture. Lyndon B. Johnson's warnings during the Vietnam War that failure to act would repeat the mistakes preceding the Second World War transformed a regional conflict into a civilizational struggle against tyranny. Such rhetoric converted uncertainty into moral certainty by suggesting that hesitation itself could produce catastrophic consequences. Through this symbolic framework, war becomes not a political choice but a moral obligation imposed by history.

The repeated use of Hitler analogies throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries demonstrates how propaganda depends upon historical mythologies capable of reorganizing public perception around emotionally charged archetypes. Political leaders such as Manuel Noriega, Slobodan Milosevic, and Saddam Hussein were gradually transformed within public discourse into modern incarnations of Hitler regardless of the vast differences separating their historical conditions, political systems, and geopolitical significance. The simplification itself became strategically valuable because propaganda thrives upon symbolic clarity rather than analytical complexity. During the Gulf War, initial discussions concerning strategic interests and oil resources gradually gave way to rhetoric centered upon stopping "naked aggression" and confronting a dictator allegedly embodying the same dangers as Nazi Germany. The moral language surrounding intervention concealed the political and economic calculations operating beneath the surface while simultaneously transforming military action into an act of ethical responsibility. Media institutions played an essential role in reinforcing this symbolic structure. Television commentators, newspaper columnists, and political analysts repeatedly circulated comparisons between foreign adversaries and Hitler until these associations became normalized within public consciousness. The repetition of such imagery created emotional momentum that overwhelmed critical reflection. Once the analogy became dominant, alternative interpretations appeared morally suspect or dangerously naïve. Critics warning against oversimplification struggled to compete with the emotional immediacy of narratives invoking fascism and genocide. Propaganda therefore succeeded not because it provided detailed evidence but because it activated collective memories deeply embedded within cultural consciousness. The public was encouraged to interpret every new conflict through the emotional lens of the Second World War, where intervention represented heroism and restraint risked catastrophic betrayal.

Solomon ultimately portrays the Hitler analogy as part of a broader communicative strategy through which modern states convert geopolitical conflicts into spectacles of moral absolutism designed to eliminate ambiguity and accelerate public support for war. Democratic societies often resist prolonged uncertainty because ambiguity weakens political mobilization. Propaganda resolves this problem by reducing international relations into emotionally accessible binaries between civilization and barbarism, freedom and tyranny, innocence and evil. Within this framework, the enemy ceases to exist as a political actor shaped by historical conditions and instead becomes an abstract embodiment of danger itself. Such demonization permits governments to justify extraordinary measures while discouraging critical examination of their own motives and actions. The repeated invocation of Hitler creates a psychological environment in which military escalation appears preventive rather than aggressive, defensive rather than expansionist. Citizens are taught that failure to confront the designated tyrant immediately will inevitably lead to global catastrophe. This rhetoric transforms fear into patriotic duty while marginalizing dissent as

irresponsible or morally compromised. The media amplifies this atmosphere by privileging emotionally charged imagery and simplified narratives capable of generating public unity during moments of crisis. In doing so, journalism increasingly abandons analytical distance and becomes integrated into the symbolic machinery of war preparation. The demonization of enemies therefore reveals how propaganda reshapes historical memory itself, using the trauma of past atrocities to legitimize present violence. The image of Hitler becomes less a historical reference than a political weapon capable of suspending skepticism and reorganizing public consciousness around the logic of permanent confrontation. Through repetition, emotional symbolism, and moral absolutism, democratic societies are guided toward war while remaining convinced that they are acting in defense of humanity rather than participating in another cycle of manufactured conflict and strategic persuasion.

Solomon, N. (2005) War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

The Currency of Conflict: The Veil of Humanitarian Power

Norman Solomon in his book *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death* explores the persistent effort of political leaders and media institutions to conceal the economic foundations of military intervention beneath moral rhetoric, revealing how modern warfare is repeatedly presented as a struggle for freedom, security, or humanitarian justice while corporate interests remain carefully obscured behind symbolic narratives of national duty. In democratic societies, wars cannot easily be justified through open declarations of economic ambition because populations expect military violence to possess ethical legitimacy. Political leaders therefore frame interventions in terms of moral obligation, global stability, and the defense of civilization while minimizing discussions concerning resources, strategic markets, or financial profit. During the Gulf crisis of 1990, President George H. W. Bush initially acknowledged the importance of oil and global energy stability when discussing the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. His statements reflected the geopolitical reality that control over Persian Gulf oil reserves held immense significance for American economic interests and international influence. Yet as public scrutiny intensified and antiwar criticism emerged, the rhetoric gradually shifted away from economics toward moral absolutism. The conflict was no longer publicly presented as connected to oil but rather as a heroic stand against “naked aggression.” This transformation illustrates one of the essential functions of propaganda within liberal democracies: the translation of material interests into ethical imperatives. Economic motivations alone rarely inspire collective sacrifice, but narratives centered upon justice, freedom, and resistance to tyranny possess enormous emotional power. Through this rhetorical shift, military intervention becomes detached from questions of profit and instead appears as an altruistic act performed in defense of universal principles. The concealment of economic motives is therefore not accidental but structurally necessary for the preservation of public legitimacy during war.

The text further demonstrates that corporate and military interests remain deeply intertwined within the machinery of modern conflict, despite persistent efforts to erase these relationships from public consciousness. Wars generate vast opportunities for defense contractors, reconstruction firms, financial institutions, and multinational corporations connected to energy and infrastructure. The military-industrial system depends upon continuous geopolitical instability because conflict sustains the circulation of contracts, weapons production, and strategic influence across global markets. Arms sales alone represent a massive international industry in which the United States

occupies a dominant position, exporting military equipment to governments aligned with its geopolitical priorities while simultaneously expanding political dependency and economic influence. Developing nations become both strategic allies and profitable consumers within this system, purchasing advanced weaponry at enormous cost while opening their economies to foreign corporations and investment networks. Reconstruction projects following military intervention create additional opportunities for politically connected companies that benefit directly from destruction itself. Yet public discourse rarely acknowledges these material dimensions openly. Instead, media narratives emphasize themes of liberation, democracy, humanitarian rescue, or protection against aggression. Even commentators celebrated as liberal internationalists often participate in this symbolic reframing by portraying military campaigns as visionary democratic missions disconnected from oil, markets, or corporate expansion. Thomas Friedman's praise of the Iraq War as a revolutionary democracy-building project exemplifies how intellectual rhetoric can transform geopolitical intervention into moral spectacle while excluding discussion of the vast petroleum reserves underlying strategic interest in the region. The omission itself becomes politically significant because propaganda frequently operates through silence rather than explicit falsehood. Citizens encounter emotionally persuasive narratives stripped of the economic realities shaping policy decisions behind the scenes.

Solomon ultimately portrays the denial of economic motives as central to the mythology sustaining modern warfare within democratic cultures. Political leaders understand that direct acknowledgment of corporate profit, energy control, or financial gain would undermine the moral authority required to maintain public support for military action. As a result, propaganda constructs a symbolic division between idealism and material interest, presenting wars as ethical responses to aggression while relegating economic incentives to the margins of acceptable discussion. Occasional moments of honesty from politicians, journalists, or policymakers briefly expose the concealed logic operating beneath official rhetoric, yet these revelations are quickly absorbed back into the dominant narrative structure. Public debate becomes carefully managed through emotional framing, selective emphasis, and moral simplification designed to redirect attention away from structural questions concerning power and profit. Media institutions play a decisive role in maintaining this illusion because they repeatedly privilege narratives centered upon heroism, humanitarianism, and national security while treating discussions of economic motivation as cynical or conspiratorial. Citizens are therefore encouraged to perceive war as the defense of abstract values rather than the protection of strategic economic systems. This process reveals a deeper transformation in political language itself. Terms such as freedom, democracy, and security gradually lose stable meaning and become symbolic instruments used to legitimize policies serving interconnected state and corporate interests. War becomes both a military operation and a communicative performance through which economic ambition is purified into moral necessity. Beneath the language of liberation and justice operates a vast network of industries, financial institutions, and political alliances whose survival depends upon the continuation of global conflict. The concealment of these realities allows democratic societies to sustain the illusion that military interventions emerge from ethical responsibility rather than from the material logic of geopolitical power and corporate accumulation.

Solomon, N. (2005) War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

The Screen of Obedience: The Spectacle of Sanitized Violence

Norman Solomon in his book *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death* explores the transformation of modern warfare into a mediated spectacle where television, political rhetoric, and corporate influence combine to distance the public from the true brutality of conflict, creating a carefully controlled representation of violence that preserves support for military intervention while concealing its psychological, human, and economic devastation. Modern war is no longer experienced directly by most citizens but consumed through screens, edited footage, and emotionally managed narratives that convert destruction into spectacle. Television creates the illusion of proximity while simultaneously enforcing emotional distance. Audiences witness explosions, military briefings, and patriotic symbolism, yet remain detached from the physical terror, bodily suffering, and existential chaos that define actual combat. The viewer observes war without inhabiting its reality. Images are selected, arranged, and framed according to institutional priorities that favor coherence, heroism, and strategic clarity over confusion, trauma, and moral ambiguity. What emerges is not war itself but a symbolic reconstruction of war designed for public consumption. This reconstruction depends heavily upon language capable of softening violence and transforming military aggression into morally acceptable performance. Pentagon operations receive euphemistic names such as Operation Just Cause, Desert Shield, or Enduring Freedom because language possesses the power to conceal brutality beneath abstract ideals. These names function as psychological instruments intended to replace images of death and destruction with narratives of protection, necessity, and moral righteousness. Through symbolic terminology, warfare becomes detached from its consequences and reimagined as an organized defense of civilization. Euphemism therefore operates as a form of ideological anesthesia that shields public consciousness from the unbearable realities hidden beneath official rhetoric.

The text further reveals that media institutions function not merely as passive transmitters of information but as active participants within a larger military-industrial-media system shaped by political pressure, corporate interests, and strategic communication. Large defense corporations, reconstruction firms, and financial networks profit enormously from prolonged conflict, yet these economic dimensions remain largely absent from mainstream representations of war. Public discourse emphasizes humanitarian intervention, national security, and democratic values while systematically minimizing discussions concerning arms contracts, resource acquisition, or corporate expansion. Television news contributes to this concealment through its structural dependence upon official sources, military access, and compressed visual storytelling. Embedded journalism further intensifies this relationship by placing reporters within military units where their perspective becomes increasingly shaped by the operational and emotional environment of the armed forces themselves. Journalists witness events through institutional frameworks established by military authorities, limiting their ability to critically examine the broader political and human consequences of conflict. As a result, coverage often resembles public relations more than independent investigation. Short clips, dramatic sound bites, and emotionally charged imagery simplify complex geopolitical realities into narratives easily digestible for mass audiences. Fear, patriotism, and urgency replace sustained reflection. The repetitive circulation of official talking points creates the impression of consensus while marginalizing voices questioning the legitimacy or purpose of military intervention. Censorship in this context rarely appears as direct prohibition; instead, it emerges through omission, narrative framing, editorial priorities, and self-censorship shaped by institutional pressures. The most horrifying dimensions of war remain largely invisible because they threaten the emotional stability of the narrative sustaining public support.

Solomon ultimately portrays televised warfare as part of a broader transformation in which democratic societies increasingly experience political reality through mediated spectacle rather than direct understanding. The public assumes that if a war were fundamentally unjust or catastrophic, the media would reveal this truth openly. Yet the structures of modern communication often prevent such revelations from emerging with sustained clarity or emotional force. Isolated critical voices occasionally appear, but they are overwhelmed by the dominant symbolic order that frames military intervention as necessary, manageable, and morally defensible. Images of destruction become normalized through repetition, while the deeper suffering of civilians, soldiers, and entire societies disappears beneath strategic narratives emphasizing precision, liberation, and progress. Television reduces war to consumable fragments that fit comfortably within entertainment-driven formats, allowing audiences to observe devastation without confronting its full moral implications. In this environment, warfare becomes psychologically distant even as it remains politically central. The media thus performs a stabilizing function for state power by transforming violence into controlled representation and preventing public outrage from reaching destabilizing intensity. Beneath this spectacle operates a network of corporate and governmental interests benefiting from the continuation of conflict while maintaining the appearance of democratic transparency. Citizens are encouraged to believe they are witnessing objective reality when in fact they are consuming narratives shaped through strategic selection, ideological framing, and commercial calculation. The hidden tragedy of modern propaganda is therefore not merely that information is manipulated, but that entire populations become conditioned to experience war as abstraction rather than human catastrophe. Through euphemism, selective imagery, and emotional management, democratic societies preserve the illusion that violence remains rational, ethical, and necessary while the true horror of war disappears behind the glowing surface of the screen.

Solomon, N. (2005) War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

The Theater of Credibility: The Discipline of Managed Truth

Norman Solomon in his book *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death* investigates the hidden structures through which democratic governments cultivate public trust while simultaneously manipulating perception, revealing that political deception rarely appears in the form of direct falsehood and instead functions through omission, selective framing, emotional performance, and the strategic management of information. Modern political authority depends upon maintaining the appearance of honesty even while concealing essential realities from public view. Citizens within democratic societies are conditioned to believe that elected leaders may occasionally withhold details for security reasons, but would never intentionally construct deceptive narratives capable of leading an entire nation into catastrophic war. This belief forms the psychological foundation upon which propaganda operates most effectively. Daniel Ellsberg's experiences within the Pentagon during the Vietnam era exposed how carefully officials performed sincerity while shaping narratives designed to obscure the truth. John T. McNaughton's exaggerated Midwestern mannerisms during interviews created the impression of harmless authenticity and transparent candor. His cultivated simplicity disarmed reporters and encouraged emotional trust, allowing evasions and distortions to pass unnoticed beneath the appearance of openness. Ellsberg later recognized similar tactics in Edward Lansdale, whose deliberate informality functioned as a protective mask concealing strategic ambiguity. These performances demonstrate that modern propaganda increasingly relies upon personality, tone, and emotional

symbolism rather than crude authoritarian censorship. Political figures do not simply communicate information; they construct emotional relationships with audiences that reduce skepticism and normalize selective truthfulness. Journalists and citizens alike often mistake familiarity and apparent honesty for factual reliability, creating conditions in which deception flourishes invisibly beneath the rituals of democratic communication.

The controversy surrounding the Pentagon's Office of Strategic Influence after 9/11 further revealed how modern states publicly condemn overt propaganda while quietly preserving the deeper mechanisms of strategic deception. When reports emerged that the office intended to spread misleading information internationally, political leaders quickly moved to reassure the public that democratic institutions remained committed to truthfulness. President Bush declared that Americans would be told the truth, while Donald Rumsfeld announced the office's closure as evidence of institutional integrity. Yet the disappearance of a single department did not alter the broader communicative system already shaping public understanding of the war on terror and the coming invasion of Iraq. Intelligence reports concerning weapons of mass destruction and alleged connections between Saddam Hussein and terrorism continued circulating through media channels despite significant contradictions and uncertainty. Lieutenant Colonel Karen Kwiatkowski later described how fragments of genuine intelligence were reorganized into narratives carefully crafted to produce fear, certainty, and emotional urgency. Facts themselves were not always entirely fabricated; rather, they were selectively arranged and interpreted to generate misleading conclusions. This method reflects the sophisticated character of democratic propaganda, where omission often proves more effective than outright lying. A Pentagon official's statement that "we lie by not telling you things" exposes the central logic of strategic communication within modern political systems. Silence becomes a weapon as powerful as speech. Information excluded from public discourse shapes perception just as decisively as information openly presented. Citizens are encouraged to construct opinions within realities carefully engineered through selective disclosure, emotional repetition, and institutional authority. The result is not complete fabrication but the construction of persuasive partial realities that guide public consciousness toward predetermined political objectives.

Solomon ultimately portrays the media as an indispensable component within the machinery of modern war propaganda, functioning not merely as an observer of political deception but as an institution deeply integrated into the production and circulation of official narratives. During the buildup to the Iraq War, journalists repeatedly amplified claims concerning hidden weapons programs and imminent threats while minimizing contradictory evidence that challenged the legitimacy of military intervention. Reports based on defectors and anonymous intelligence sources gained enormous visibility because they reinforced emotionally compelling narratives already favored by political elites. Stories concerning Hussein Kamel and Iraq's alleged weapons capabilities circulated widely even when later challenged by intelligence assessments and contradictory testimony. Media organizations prioritized dramatic narratives of danger and urgency because such stories aligned with patriotic sentiment, political expectations, and the commercial logic of crisis-driven journalism. Figures such as Kenneth Pollack further legitimized the atmosphere of inevitability surrounding invasion through authoritative language presenting speculative assumptions as strategic certainty. Even after evidence undermined the official rationale for war, institutional self-criticism remained superficial and defensive. The New York Times later admitted failures in reporting but framed itself as another victim of misinformation rather than acknowledging its active role in reproducing and legitimizing deceptive state narratives. This response revealed how deeply propaganda had penetrated the structures of modern

journalism itself. The press maintained the appearance of independence while functioning as a mechanism for amplifying governmental agendas and manufacturing public consensus. Under these conditions, democratic discourse becomes increasingly theatrical. Citizens believe they are witnessing open debate while the boundaries of acceptable interpretation remain carefully managed through selective visibility, emotional framing, and institutional repetition. Modern propaganda therefore operates not through blatant dictatorship but through the disciplined orchestration of trust, where leaders and media institutions cooperate in constructing persuasive realities capable of normalizing war, suppressing dissent, and transforming manipulation into the appearance of patriotic truth.

Solomon, N. (2005) War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

The Geometry of Narratives: The Empire of Conflict Perception

Oliver Boyd-Barrett in his book *Western Mainstream Media and the Ukraine Crisis: A Study in Conflict Propaganda* examines the Ukraine crisis as a struggle not only over territory and geopolitical influence but over the production of reality itself, revealing how contemporary propaganda functions through competing media narratives that seek to shape public consciousness, moral legitimacy, and global political alignment. The crisis that unfolded in Ukraine after the political upheaval of 2014 rapidly became more than a regional dispute; it evolved into a symbolic confrontation between rival geopolitical imaginaries promoted through highly organized communication systems. Mainstream Western media largely framed the events as a democratic uprising against corruption and authoritarian influence, portraying the movement toward Europe as the natural expression of freedom, progress, and modern political aspiration. Alternative media and Russian-oriented narratives, however, interpreted the same events as a Western-supported coup facilitated through strategic intervention, ideological manipulation, and collaboration with radical nationalist factions. Boyd-Barrett demonstrates that these conflicting interpretations reveal the fragmented character of contemporary global communication in a multipolar world where competing centers of power struggle to define legitimacy and historical truth. Media institutions no longer merely report events; they construct symbolic realities through selective emphasis, emotional framing, and ideological repetition. Every narrative establishes moral binaries dividing the world into forces of liberation and oppression, democracy and authoritarianism, victimhood and aggression. Through this process, geopolitical conflicts become moral dramas in which audiences are encouraged to identify emotionally with one side while dismissing alternative perspectives as propaganda or disinformation. The struggle over Ukraine therefore reflects a deeper transformation in international communication where the control of narratives becomes inseparable from the exercise of geopolitical power itself.

The analysis identifies multiple narrative structures through which Western and alternative media constructed opposing realities surrounding the Ukraine crisis. Western discourse generally emphasized themes of democratic aspiration, national sovereignty, and resistance against Russian aggression, while alternative perspectives highlighted the influence of Western geopolitical strategy, economic intervention, and ideological engineering. Boyd-Barrett reveals that propaganda functions not simply through direct falsehoods but through selective contextualization and strategic omission. Mainstream coverage often minimized the role of nationalist militias, foreign political influence, and internal regional divisions within Ukraine while amplifying narratives concerning Russian expansionism and threats to European stability. Conversely,

Russian and alternative media frequently emphasized neo-fascist elements within the Maidan movement, NATO encirclement, and Western interference while downplaying the complexity of Ukrainian political aspirations and regional identities. The competing representations of Crimea, Eastern Ukraine, MH17, sanctions, and the legitimacy of the Kiev government illustrate how modern propaganda depends upon the construction of emotionally coherent symbolic systems rather than objective neutrality. Events are framed within broader ideological mythologies concerning democracy, imperialism, sovereignty, and civilization itself. Through repetition, selective sourcing, and strategic framing, media narratives transform ambiguity into moral certainty. The audience encounters not raw historical complexity but carefully organized realities structured according to institutional interests and geopolitical alignments. Boyd-Barrett's examination demonstrates that mainstream media possess enormous power because they shape not only what is discussed but the limits within which interpretation becomes socially acceptable. Alternative media destabilize these hegemonic frameworks by introducing contradictory evidence, marginalized perspectives, and competing explanatory structures, thereby exposing the instability beneath dominant narratives.

Boyd-Barrett ultimately situates the Ukraine crisis within a broader theory of conflict propaganda rooted in the relationship between media systems, political power, and imperial ambition. Propaganda, in this framework, extends beyond isolated misinformation campaigns and becomes a systemic process embedded within institutions of communication, finance, military strategy, and ideological production. Modern propaganda rarely presents itself openly as manipulation because democratic societies maintain strong cultural attachments to ideals of objectivity, pluralism, and free expression. Instead, propaganda emerges through the normalization of certain assumptions, the privileging of institutional authority, and the strategic organization of the information environment itself. Concepts such as strategic communication, information operations, and perception management reflect the evolution of propaganda into sophisticated systems designed to shape entire cognitive landscapes rather than individual opinions alone. Boyd-Barrett connects contemporary media narratives to longer historical traditions of imperial communication, demonstrating how wars, humanitarian interventions, economic restructuring, and ideological campaigns are repeatedly justified through symbolic frameworks masking deeper political and economic interests. Media institutions operate as extensions of power because they determine which realities become visible, which interpretations gain legitimacy, and which forms of dissent are marginalized or delegitimized. The study therefore challenges simplistic distinctions between truth and falsehood by emphasizing the selective and constructed nature of all communication. What matters is not merely whether a statement is technically accurate, but how narratives are assembled, whose interests they serve, and how they shape public consciousness regarding war, sovereignty, and political legitimacy. In the modern media environment, propaganda becomes less about forcing belief through coercion and more about organizing emotional perception through continuous symbolic repetition. The Ukraine crisis reveals how global communication systems increasingly function as battlegrounds where competing empires struggle not only for territory or influence, but for the authority to define reality itself.

Boyd-Barrett, O. (2017) Western Mainstream Media and the Ukraine Crisis: A Study in Conflict Propaganda. London: Routledge.

The Architecture of Consent: The Rituals of Imperial Narration

Oliver Boyd-Barrett in his book *Western Mainstream Media and the Ukraine Crisis: A Study in Conflict Propaganda* examines the operational principles through which Western conflict propaganda constructs moral legitimacy, organizes public perception, and sustains geopolitical power by selectively framing events, privileging official narratives, and systematically delegitimizing alternative interpretations. Propaganda within Western media systems rarely appears in explicit or openly authoritarian forms because its effectiveness depends precisely upon invisibility. It functions through normalization, repetition, omission, and the strategic privileging of institutional voices aligned with dominant political and economic interests. Mainstream media do not generally announce themselves as propagandistic instruments; instead, they cultivate the appearance of neutrality, objectivity, and democratic freedom while reproducing narratives favorable to Western centers of power. Through this process, the public encounters carefully organized realities where certain assumptions become self-evident truths while competing perspectives are marginalized as irrational, extremist, or foreign disinformation. Boyd-Barrett demonstrates that propaganda is not merely the circulation of falsehoods but the systematic shaping of emotional and intellectual environments in which audiences interpret political events. The language used to describe allies, enemies, protests, invasions, elections, humanitarian actions, and democratic legitimacy becomes essential to the maintenance of geopolitical hierarchies. Western-approved governments are framed as democratic and reformist even when they emerge through unconstitutional upheaval or oligarchic domination, while governments resisting Western influence are represented as authoritarian, irrational, or inherently aggressive regardless of internal complexity. Propaganda therefore functions less as isolated deception and more as a continuous moral ordering of the world designed to preserve ideological coherence within imperial systems of communication.

The principles outlined in the text reveal how conflict propaganda depends upon asymmetrical standards applied selectively according to geopolitical alignment rather than universal ethical criteria. Actions considered legitimate when performed by Western allies become condemned as aggression when undertaken by geopolitical rivals. If a regime favored by Western powers deploys military force against internal dissenters, such violence is justified as necessary for stability or democracy. Yet similar actions by governments outside Western approval are immediately transformed into evidence of tyranny demanding humanitarian intervention and regime change. The same asymmetry governs interpretations of elections, protests, secession movements, invasions, and humanitarian aid. Elections conducted under Western-approved authorities are portrayed as democratic triumphs despite corruption, instability, or oligarchic influence, while elections or referenda organized outside Western influence are dismissed as illegitimate regardless of popular participation. Protest movements aligned with Western objectives are celebrated as heroic democratic uprisings even when they involve violence or unconstitutional methods, whereas resistance against Western-backed regimes is framed as hooliganism, extremism, or foreign manipulation. Boyd-Barrett demonstrates that such double standards are sustained through selective contextualization. Western media frequently omit historical circumstances capable of complicating official narratives, including NATO expansion, prior Western military interventions, economic exploitation, or longstanding cultural and linguistic ties between populations. The absence of context produces simplified moral binaries where Western power appears defensive and benevolent while geopolitical rivals appear uniquely expansionist and threatening. Evidence itself becomes ideologically filtered according to its source. Claims made by Western governments, intelligence agencies, or approved media organizations are treated as inherently credible even when unsupported or contradictory, while evidence from non-Western or alternative

sources is automatically dismissed as propaganda regardless of factual validity. Through repetition and emotional framing, uncertain claims gradually solidify into accepted truths, reinforcing demonization and moral certainty within public consciousness.

Boyd-Barrett ultimately portrays Western conflict propaganda as part of a broader imperial communication structure in which media systems function to stabilize geopolitical dominance by controlling symbolic legitimacy and emotional interpretation. Propaganda operates through the selective distribution of sympathy, outrage, and moral visibility. The suffering of populations aligned with Western interests receives extensive emotional coverage and humanitarian concern, while suffering caused by Western allies is minimized, justified, or ignored entirely. Fascist or extremist forces become politically invisible when they support Western geopolitical objectives, whereas similar ideologies associated with geopolitical adversaries are magnified into defining characteristics of entire societies or movements. The attribution of responsibility follows the same logic. Leaders demonized within Western narratives become personally accountable for all actions undertaken by groups allegedly connected to them, even when evidence remains weak or ambiguous. Meanwhile, the structural violence and geopolitical interventions of Western powers are treated as fragmented incidents disconnected from broader systems of imperial strategy. Propaganda thus transforms complex political realities into emotionally manageable narratives centered upon moral clarity rather than historical analysis. Media institutions play a decisive role because they shape not only what populations know but how they feel about what they know. Through framing, omission, selective sourcing, and symbolic repetition, Western media cultivate an ideological environment where imperial interests appear synonymous with democracy, humanitarianism, and international order. The most powerful feature of this system lies in its ability to present itself as non-propagandistic precisely because it operates under the language of freedom, objectivity, and open debate. The public is encouraged to believe that propaganda exists only in enemy states while remaining largely unaware of the structural and institutional forces shaping perception within their own media environment. Conflict propaganda therefore becomes a mechanism through which geopolitical dominance is maintained not merely through military or economic power, but through the continuous organization of reality itself according to the symbolic needs of empire.

Boyd-Barrett, O. (2017) Western Mainstream Media and the Ukraine Crisis: A Study in Conflict Propaganda. London: Routledge.

The Myth of Liberation: The Hegemony of Manufactured Reality

Oliver Boyd-Barrett in his book *Western Mainstream Media and the Ukraine Crisis: A Study in Conflict Propaganda* analyzes the construction of the dominant Western narrative surrounding the Ukraine crisis, revealing how mainstream media systems organize political reality through selective framing, emotional symbolism, and ideological simplification in ways that reinforce broader structures of geopolitical power. The crisis in Ukraine is presented within mainstream Western discourse as a moral drama centered upon a heroic national struggle for liberation from the lingering shadow of Soviet and Russian influence. Through this narrative, Ukraine becomes the symbolic embodiment of democratic aspiration, modernity, and European identity, while Russia is transformed into the threatening antagonist seeking to suppress freedom through aggression and authoritarian expansion. Boyd-Barrett demonstrates that this framing depends upon a distinctly Manichean structure dividing the political world into forces of virtue and forces of malignancy. Such narratives function effectively because they appeal to deeply rooted cultural

archetypes familiar to Western audiences: the small democratic nation resisting imperial domination, the people rising against corruption, and the triumph of freedom over tyranny. The Maidan protests are therefore represented not simply as political events but as symbols of moral awakening and democratic courage. The overthrow of the existing government becomes interpreted as a necessary act of liberation against a corrupt and oppressive order aligned with Russian interests. Yet this symbolic structure requires the systematic exclusion of contextual complexities capable of destabilizing the narrative's moral clarity. Historical ambiguities, geopolitical calculations, ideological contradictions, and economic interests are reduced or silenced in order to preserve the emotional coherence of the dominant discourse. Propaganda thus operates not primarily through explicit lies but through the disciplined organization of visibility itself, determining which realities remain central and which disappear into silence.

Boyd-Barrett further argues that the dominant narrative surrounding Ukraine depends heavily upon the suppression or marginalization of contradictory evidence that complicates the simplistic dichotomy between democratic virtue and authoritarian evil. The role of Western intervention in shaping Ukrainian politics, including support for neoliberal restructuring and geopolitical realignment, receives comparatively little emphasis within mainstream discourse. Similarly, the participation of radical nationalist and extreme right-wing factions during the Maidan protests is often minimized, reframed, or dismissed despite their visible ideological and organizational significance. Questions surrounding possible provocations, false-flag violence, and failures to investigate killings during the Maidan and Odessa events are largely absent from dominant representations because such issues threaten the moral purity of the democratic uprising narrative. Boyd-Barrett also emphasizes that Ukraine's longstanding problems of oligarchic influence, economic instability, corruption, and regional division cannot easily be reconciled with portrayals of a unified democratic revolution. The demographic and linguistic realities of southern and eastern Ukraine, where many populations favored greater autonomy or federalization rather than complete alignment with the new nationalist orientation of Kiev, complicate the assumption that the conflict represented a straightforward confrontation between Ukraine and Russian aggression. The Minsk agreements themselves implicitly acknowledged the importance of decentralization and pluralism within Ukraine, yet these dimensions were frequently overshadowed by narratives emphasizing separatism, foreign manipulation, and Russian expansionism. Through selective emphasis and omission, mainstream Western media produced a symbolic environment in which complex internal conflicts became externalized into a singular narrative of Russian interference. This simplification enabled geopolitical confrontation to be interpreted through emotionally compelling categories of invasion, resistance, and democratic defense rather than through nuanced analysis of competing historical, cultural, and political interests.

Boyd-Barrett ultimately portrays the Ukraine crisis as an illustration of how contemporary propaganda functions within an increasingly unstable global order where legacy media institutions continue to dominate the production of political legitimacy despite the growing availability of alternative information sources. Mainstream Western media retain enormous influence because their proximity to political and economic power grants them the authority to define what counts as credible reality. The narratives they construct become foundational frameworks shaping the assumptions of future journalists, academics, policymakers, and citizens who inherit these interpretations as established historical truth. Even when contradictory evidence exists across alternative media, independent investigations, or foreign sources, such information struggles to compete with the symbolic authority of mainstream discourse. Propaganda succeeds not because all opposing voices are silenced, but because hegemonic narratives establish the interpretive

boundaries within which most public understanding occurs. The public rarely possesses the time, resources, or motivation to systematically investigate foreign conflicts beyond the dominant frameworks provided by established media institutions. As a result, emotionally powerful narratives concerning freedom, aggression, democracy, and national identity become internalized as self-evident truths regardless of their omissions or contradictions. Boyd-Barrett therefore situates modern conflict propaganda within broader transformations of global communication and imperial power. The decline of older geopolitical certainties and the emergence of multipolar competition intensify struggles over narrative control because symbolic legitimacy increasingly determines the moral and political conditions under which military, economic, and diplomatic actions become acceptable. Media systems function as instruments of this struggle by organizing perception, assigning moral value, and defining the emotional architecture through which populations interpret international events. The Ukraine crisis reveals how propaganda in contemporary democratic societies operates through narrative dominance rather than overt coercion, shaping reality not by eliminating complexity entirely but by arranging complexity into emotionally persuasive myths that reinforce existing structures of geopolitical authority and ideological power.

Boyd-Barrett, O. (2017) Western Mainstream Media and the Ukraine Crisis: A Study in Conflict Propaganda. London: Routledge.

The Cartography of Persuasion: The Empire of Selective Reality

Oliver Boyd-Barrett in his article “Ukraine, Mainstream Media and Conflict Propaganda” investigates the mechanisms through which Western mainstream media construct dominant interpretations of geopolitical conflict, arguing that contemporary propaganda functions less through direct fabrication than through selective framing, strategic omission, emotional simplification, and the repetition of ideologically useful narratives that reinforce the interests of Western political power. The Ukraine crisis is presented as a critical example of modern information warfare unfolding within an increasingly unstable multipolar world where global influence depends not only upon military and economic strength but also upon the ability to shape public consciousness through media representation. Boyd-Barrett demonstrates that mainstream Western media largely framed the events in Ukraine through a moralized dichotomy in which Kiev represented democracy, modernization, and national liberation, while Russia symbolized aggression, authoritarianism, and imperial ambition. Such narratives relied upon emotionally accessible archetypes deeply rooted within Western political culture: the courageous people resisting oppression, the heroic democratic uprising, and the dangerous expansionist enemy threatening freedom and sovereignty. Through constant repetition, these symbolic structures transformed highly complex political realities into simplified moral dramas easily consumed by audiences. Yet the power of these narratives depended precisely upon the systematic suppression of contextual factors capable of destabilizing their emotional coherence. The historical relationship between NATO expansion and Russian security concerns, the economic interests connected to IMF restructuring, the role of oligarchic power within Ukraine, and the participation of radical nationalist factions during the Maidan movement were minimized or strategically marginalized. Propaganda therefore emerged not primarily as outright lying but as the disciplined management of visibility itself, where certain realities remained illuminated while others disappeared into silence.

Boyd-Barrett further argues that Western mainstream media increasingly function as extensions of geopolitical power because they privilege official state narratives while marginalizing alternative interpretations presented by independent, non-Western, or dissident media sources. The apparent pluralism celebrated within digital media environments often conceals a deeper ideological conformity in which dominant institutions reproduce remarkably synchronized perspectives during moments of international crisis. The same patterns previously visible in media coverage of Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, and Iran reappeared during the Ukraine crisis. Mainstream outlets relied heavily upon official Western sources, intelligence claims, and institutional assumptions while presenting these frameworks as objective reality rather than ideologically constructed interpretations. Through processes of indexing, framing, and selective sourcing, uncertain events gradually hardened into accepted truths. Initial ambiguity surrounding Crimea, Russian involvement in Eastern Ukraine, and the status of separatist movements gave way through repetition to definitive language such as “annexation,” “invasion,” and “proxy warfare.” The absence of conclusive evidence did not weaken the narrative; instead, uncertainty itself became interpreted as proof of the enemy’s hidden sophistication. Boyd-Barrett demonstrates that such transformations reveal how propaganda works through emotional conditioning rather than rational inquiry. Audiences are encouraged to internalize assumptions about legitimacy, democracy, aggression, and humanitarianism long before contradictory evidence can emerge with comparable symbolic force. The selective application of principles concerning elections, protests, secession, and military intervention further exposes the asymmetrical moral logic operating within Western discourse. Secessionist movements supported by Western powers are framed as democratic expressions of self-determination, while similar movements outside Western approval become illegitimate threats to international order. Protests aligned with Western geopolitical interests are celebrated as democratic revolutions, whereas resistance against Western-backed regimes is condemned as extremism or foreign manipulation. Such double standards reveal that moral language frequently functions as a strategic instrument for legitimizing geopolitical objectives rather than as a universal ethical framework.

Boyd-Barrett ultimately situates the Ukraine crisis within a broader transformation of global communication where propaganda increasingly operates through hegemonic narrative control rather than explicit censorship. Mainstream media retain enormous symbolic authority because of their institutional proximity to political, economic, and military power. Their narratives shape not only immediate public opinion but the long-term intellectual frameworks inherited by journalists, academics, policymakers, and future generations seeking to understand historical events. Most audiences lack the time or resources to investigate foreign conflicts independently and therefore rely upon established media institutions to define the essential contours of reality. As a result, the narratives produced by these institutions become foundational myths organizing collective memory and political legitimacy. Boyd-Barrett emphasizes that recognizing the propagandistic qualities of Western media does not automatically validate all alternative or Russian narratives. Rather, the purpose is to expose the ideological structures through which mainstream discourse achieves hegemony while presenting itself as neutral and objective. Propaganda in contemporary democracies succeeds precisely because it rarely announces itself openly. It appears instead through the language of freedom, humanitarian concern, democracy promotion, and objective journalism. Beneath these surfaces operates a sophisticated system of perception management designed to align public consciousness with the strategic interests of dominant power centers. The Ukraine crisis therefore illustrates how modern media systems have become battlegrounds where competing geopolitical actors struggle to define legitimacy, morality, and truth itself. In this environment, propaganda no longer simply persuades populations about isolated events; it

organizes entire symbolic universes within which populations interpret the meaning of war, sovereignty, resistance, and global order.

Boyd-Barrett, O. (2017) 'Ukraine, Mainstream Media and Conflict Propaganda', Journalism Studies, 18(8), pp. 1016–1034.

The Spectacle of Crisis: The Machinery of Narrative Warfare

Oliver Boyd-Barrett in his book *Conflict Propaganda in Syria: Narrative Battles* examines the relationship between war, media, and propaganda within the unstable political environment of the twenty-first century, arguing that contemporary conflicts are increasingly shaped not only through military force but through the strategic construction of narratives designed to manage public consciousness, legitimize intervention, and preserve dominant geopolitical interests. Modern warfare unfolds within a global system already burdened by overlapping crises involving environmental collapse, economic inequality, surveillance, migration, terrorism, and the weakening of democratic institutions. Although the early twenty-first century may appear less openly violent than many earlier historical periods, Boyd-Barrett emphasizes that violence has not disappeared; rather, it has transformed into diffuse and systemic forms woven into the structures of global capitalism, technological control, and geopolitical rivalry. Wars intensify these crises by destabilizing societies, accelerating displacement, expanding authoritarian practices, and deepening ideological polarization. The so-called “war on terror” emerged within a broader struggle over resources, energy security, and geopolitical influence during a period marked simultaneously by fossil fuel dependency, fears of resource depletion, and the disruptive rise of renewable energy technologies threatening established energy industries. In this context, propaganda becomes essential because populations must be persuaded to accept wars, interventions, and militarized policies that frequently serve strategic and corporate interests concealed beneath humanitarian rhetoric. Media institutions therefore function not merely as observers of conflict but as active participants in the production of political legitimacy. Through selective framing, repetition, emotional symbolism, and strategic omission, mainstream narratives transform highly complex geopolitical struggles into simplified moral dramas that organize public perception around fear, righteousness, and inevitability.

Boyd-Barrett further demonstrates that the crisis of modern media systems has intensified the vulnerability of public discourse to propaganda and ideological manipulation. The transformation of media industries through digitization, privatization, conglomeration, and commercialization has weakened the independent public sphere that once offered greater resistance to concentrated political and corporate influence. Although digital technologies initially appeared to promise unprecedented pluralism and democratization of information, the contemporary media environment remains dominated by a relatively small number of powerful legacy institutions possessing the credibility, resources, and audience reach necessary to shape dominant narratives. Ideas and perspectives outside these institutions struggle to influence political reality unless eventually adopted or legitimized by mainstream outlets themselves. This concentration of communicative power allows elite political, military, and economic actors to establish interpretive frameworks that define how audiences understand wars, crises, and global conflicts. Boyd-Barrett points to the role of mainstream media in creating ambiguity and confusion around issues such as climate change, where fossil fuel corporations funded campaigns of skepticism designed to delay public recognition of environmental catastrophe. Similar processes operate within geopolitical conflicts where narratives concerning humanitarian intervention, democracy promotion, terrorism,

and regime change are strategically organized to support broader structures of imperial influence and neoliberal expansion. The Syrian conflict became especially significant because it appeared to follow familiar patterns established during earlier interventions in Iraq and Libya, where allegations concerning weapons of mass destruction and humanitarian necessity functioned as pretexts for military escalation. Claims surrounding chemical weapons in Syria and political “red lines” echoed previous propaganda campaigns in which emotionally powerful accusations generated pressure for intervention long before independent verification could occur. Through these examples, Boyd-Barrett illustrates how propaganda increasingly depends upon the orchestration of appearances, staged evidence, and symbolic spectacles capable of producing emotional conviction even in the absence of certainty.

The study ultimately situates modern conflict propaganda within the broader structures of global capitalism and imperial communication. Drawing upon theories developed by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, Boyd-Barrett emphasizes that media systems are shaped by filters involving ownership, advertising, sourcing, ideological pressure, and institutional dependency that systematically privilege narratives aligned with powerful interests. Mainstream media become conduits through which states, military alliances, intelligence agencies, corporations, and elite institutions circulate strategic messages designed to normalize geopolitical agendas while marginalizing dissenting interpretations. Yet propaganda in contemporary democracies rarely appears in openly authoritarian forms. Instead, it operates through framing, indexing, priming, and selective contextualization that subtly organize perception without requiring overt censorship. The audience encounters realities already structured according to institutional assumptions about legitimacy, morality, and threat. Boyd-Barrett’s grounded-theory methodology reveals that alternative media do not necessarily form a unified opposition to mainstream discourse, but they expose the existence of competing interpretations suppressed or marginalized within dominant narratives. The Syrian conflict therefore becomes an arena of “narrative battles” where competing actors struggle not only over territory and military outcomes but over the authority to define truth itself. Modern propaganda extends beyond isolated misinformation campaigns and becomes a total communicative environment shaping emotional response, moral judgment, and historical memory. At a moment when humanity faces existential dangers including climate collapse, nuclear escalation, and deepening social fragmentation, the deterioration of independent public information systems leaves societies increasingly vulnerable to manipulation by concentrated centers of power. Propaganda thus emerges not simply as a distortion of communication but as a structural feature of contemporary global order through which political and corporate elites maintain ideological dominance while managing populations through fear, spectacle, and controlled narratives of crisis.

Boyd-Barrett, O. (2023) Conflict Propaganda in Syria: Narrative Battles. London: Routledge.

4. PROPAGANDA MODEL

The Architecture of Consent: Engines of Manufactured Reality

Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* describe propaganda not as an accidental distortion of information but as a structural mechanism deeply embedded within the organization of modern corporate media. Their argument rejects the comforting illusion that mass communication functions primarily to inform citizens in a democratic society. Instead, the modern media system is presented as an institutional apparatus designed to shape public consciousness, regulate acceptable opinion, and manufacture approval

for political and economic agendas that primarily benefit dominant elites. Propaganda within this framework does not operate through crude censorship alone. It functions through invisible systems of selection, exclusion, repetition, and normalization that determine which realities become visible and which disappear into silence. The public is not merely misinformed; it is guided toward forms of perception that reinforce existing power structures while appearing neutral, objective, and democratic.

The propaganda model identifies five interconnected filters through which information passes before reaching the public sphere. These filters are not isolated techniques but structural conditions shaping the entire process of news production. The first filter is ownership. Large media institutions are not independent civic organizations devoted to truth but massive corporations integrated into broader systems of finance, industry, and political influence. Because these organizations are driven by profit and controlled by concentrated ownership, the information they distribute inevitably reflects the interests of those who dominate economic life. Herman and Chomsky emphasize that earlier forms of radical or worker-oriented press once existed with greater freedom to criticize capitalism and entrenched authority. Over time, however, economic barriers and concentrated ownership transformed journalism into a corporate enterprise. Media organizations became increasingly dependent on preserving the same financial systems they were supposedly expected to examine critically. In such conditions, objectivity becomes subordinate to institutional survival. Stories threatening corporate interests are marginalized, softened, reframed, or ignored entirely because the preservation of economic power becomes inseparable from the production of public reality itself.

The second filter concerns advertising, which transforms information into a commercial environment governed by the needs of sponsors rather than citizens. Since newspapers, television networks, and digital platforms rely heavily on advertising revenue, they must attract audiences desirable to advertisers. The audience itself becomes the commodity being sold. News therefore functions less as a public service and more as a mechanism for maintaining consumer attention within profitable demographic categories. Content that disturbs advertisers or challenges the ideological assumptions of affluent audiences risks exclusion because it threatens revenue streams essential for institutional survival. Within this structure, journalism becomes constrained not through direct commands but through economic incentives that reward conformity and punish disruption. The appearance of freedom remains intact while invisible financial pressures shape the limits of acceptable discourse.

The third filter is sourcing, which reflects the dependence of journalists on institutions possessing authority, resources, and continuous access to information. Governments, military organizations, corporations, and official agencies become the primary suppliers of news because they provide reliable streams of statements, press conferences, reports, and interviews that can be reproduced efficiently within tight production schedules. Media institutions develop symbiotic relationships with these centers of power because independent investigation is costly and risky. Journalists who challenge official narratives too aggressively may lose access to privileged information and institutional credibility. Over time, a moral hierarchy emerges in which official voices are treated as inherently legitimate while dissenting perspectives are framed as emotional, unreliable, or extremist. This creates what Herman and Chomsky describe as a division of labor where authorities define reality while reporters merely circulate it under the appearance of neutrality.

The fourth filter, known as flak, represents the mechanisms of punishment directed against media institutions or journalists who deviate from dominant narratives. Flak can take the form of lawsuits,

political pressure, organized complaints, media attacks, lobbying campaigns, or accusations designed to intimidate and discipline dissenting voices. Corporate and political organizations possess enormous resources capable of manufacturing outrage against inconvenient reporting. The purpose of flak is not simply criticism but deterrence. It creates an atmosphere where journalists internalize institutional limits before crossing them. Through repeated punishment, entire systems of self-censorship emerge without explicit authoritarian control. Fear becomes integrated into professional culture itself, producing conformity through anticipation of consequences rather than direct prohibition.

The fifth filter originally centered on anti-communism during the Cold War, where communism functioned as a universal symbol of existential threat. By constructing ideological enemies portrayed as hostile to civilization, freedom, and democracy, governments and media institutions justified military expansion, repression, and foreign intervention while silencing domestic criticism. After the Cold War, this ideological mechanism evolved into broader structures of fear centered on terrorism, national security, and cultural threat. Herman and Chomsky argue that modern propaganda continuously requires symbolic enemies capable of unifying public anxiety and legitimizing authority. Fear transforms populations into obedient audiences willing to surrender skepticism in exchange for security. In contemporary society, these enemies may include terrorists, geopolitical rivals, migrants, environmental activists, or ideological dissidents. The specific target changes, but the underlying mechanism remains constant: social fear becomes a tool for disciplining public imagination and narrowing the boundaries of political thought.

The propaganda model demonstrates its power most clearly through comparisons between similar events receiving radically different media treatment depending on geopolitical interests. Violence committed by enemy states is magnified, personalized, and moralized, while atrocities committed by allied governments receive minimal attention or are framed as unfortunate necessities. Wars supported by dominant powers are represented as humanitarian interventions or defensive actions, whereas identical behavior by rivals becomes evidence of barbarism and aggression. Herman and Chomsky reveal that the issue is not whether facts are entirely fabricated but how they are organized, emphasized, contextualized, and emotionally framed. Even accurate reporting can function propagandistically when stripped of historical context or presented within narratives that normalize domination. Reality is therefore not simply hidden but structured through selective visibility.

The philosophical implications of the propaganda model extend far beyond journalism. It suggests that modern democratic societies may maintain systems of control not through overt censorship alone but through managed perception operating within institutions people believe to be free. Propaganda becomes most effective when it is invisible, appearing not as manipulation but as common sense. Citizens internalize assumptions presented repeatedly through media systems until ideology becomes indistinguishable from reality itself. In this sense, propaganda is not merely political communication but the engineering of social consciousness. The media do not simply describe the world; they participate in constructing the symbolic environment through which populations interpret truth, morality, danger, and legitimacy. The crisis identified by Herman and Chomsky is therefore not only informational but existential because it concerns the very capacity of individuals to distinguish autonomous thought from manufactured consent.

Herman, E.S. and Chomsky, N. (1988) Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media. New York: Pantheon Books.

Echoes of Obedience: The Survival of Manufactured Truth

Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky in their discussions surrounding Manufacturing Consent reveal that the propaganda model provoked an extraordinary public response whenever it briefly penetrated mainstream visibility. The intensity of these reactions demonstrated a paradox at the center of modern democratic communication. While major media institutions rarely examined the model seriously, ordinary audiences responded with remarkable enthusiasm whenever the theory was publicly discussed. Interviews featuring Chomsky generated unprecedented numbers of letters, phone calls, and public engagement, suggesting that many individuals instinctively recognized the mechanisms being described even if they had never encountered the theory formally. The reaction itself became evidence of the alienation produced by modern media systems. Citizens surrounded by endless information nevertheless sensed that something fundamental about public discourse had become artificial, filtered, and managed. The propaganda model offered not merely a criticism of journalism but an explanation for why public reality increasingly felt detached from authentic democratic participation.

The continuing relevance of the model was emphasized in later public discussions where Herman and Chomsky defended its applicability against critics who argued that the rise of digital communication and media plurality had weakened its explanatory power. Herman maintained that the structural conditions identified in the original theory had not disappeared but intensified through further concentration of ownership, corporate consolidation, and the expansion of global information systems. Chomsky added that propaganda functions not only through institutional constraints such as advertising or ownership but through the intellectual culture of elite society itself. The deeper problem lies within the ideological assumptions shared by political leaders, journalists, academics, and influential commentators who unconsciously reproduce dominant values while believing themselves independent. In this sense, propaganda is not merely imposed externally upon the media. It becomes embedded within professional norms, educational systems, and cultural expectations that shape what kinds of questions may be asked and what forms of skepticism remain acceptable. The boundaries of thought are established long before censorship becomes necessary. This interpretation transforms propaganda from a simple political strategy into a philosophical condition of modern society. Intellectual institutions often imagine themselves detached from structures of power, yet Herman and Chomsky argue that universities, scholarly publications, and media organizations frequently reinforce the same ideological frameworks. The illusion of neutrality becomes one of the most powerful instruments of control because it conceals the assumptions underlying public discourse. Information appears objective precisely when its institutional foundations remain invisible. Chomsky repeatedly stressed the importance of recognizing Herman's central contribution to the theory, insisting that the propaganda model emerged from rigorous structural analysis rather than rhetorical speculation. This insistence reflects another important aspect of the model itself: the struggle over intellectual recognition and authorship mirrors the broader struggle over visibility, legitimacy, and authority within systems of communication.

Empirical studies examining media language provided additional support for the propaganda model by revealing how terminology changes according to political interests. The Harvard Kennedy School study concerning waterboarding exposed the instability of moral language within corporate journalism. For decades, major newspapers consistently identified waterboarding as torture when discussing foreign governments or historical atrocities. Yet when the same practice became associated with the policies of the United States during the so-called War on Terror, media institutions suddenly abandoned the term or replaced it with more neutral language. The act itself

remained identical, but its description changed according to the identity of the perpetrator. This linguistic transformation demonstrates how propaganda often operates not through outright falsehood but through selective framing and semantic adjustment. Words lose their moral consistency when they threaten structures of authority. Torture ceases to be torture if acknowledging it would destabilize national legitimacy or challenge patriotic narratives. The implications of this phenomenon extend beyond journalism into the nature of language itself. Political power reshapes vocabulary until moral judgment becomes conditional upon institutional allegiance rather than universal principle. Glenn Greenwald's observation that media outlets frequently function as instruments of government propaganda without direct coercion highlights the subtlety of modern ideological systems. Journalists rarely require explicit orders because professional environments already reward conformity to dominant assumptions. Self-censorship emerges organically through career incentives, access to official sources, and fear of marginalization. Propaganda therefore becomes decentralized and internalized. It survives not through visible authoritarian command but through invisible habits of interpretation reproduced daily within institutional culture.

Research conducted outside the United States further reinforced the broad applicability of the propaganda model. Studies examining British media, European journalism, and international reporting revealed similar structural patterns despite differences in political systems or national cultures. Investigations into British coverage of Central America demonstrated how media narratives aligned closely with geopolitical interests while marginalizing perspectives challenging Western foreign policy. Other analyses extended the model to media systems in France, the Netherlands, and even the People's Republic of China, suggesting that propaganda emerges wherever concentrated power intersects with communication structures. The model was also applied to the film industry, where entertainment itself functions as an ideological apparatus shaping emotional assumptions about war, heroism, nationalism, and authority. Hollywood productions often reproduce political myths not because filmmakers consciously coordinate propaganda campaigns but because dominant cultural narratives become embedded within the symbolic language of mass entertainment. The News of the World phone hacking scandal in Britain offered another revealing example of the relationship between media, political power, and corporate influence. The scandal exposed the intimate connections linking journalists, politicians, police institutions, and media conglomerates, demonstrating that supposedly independent watchdogs often operate within tightly interconnected networks of elite interests. Yet the public backlash also revealed new tensions within the propaganda system. Social media campaigns pressured corporations to withdraw advertising support, contributing to the collapse of one of Britain's most influential tabloids. This suggested that digital communication could occasionally disrupt traditional propaganda structures by enabling decentralized public outrage. However, the scandal also confirmed one of Chomsky's most enduring observations: institutions genuinely committed to investigative truth often face severe financial vulnerability. The Guardian received praise for exposing the scandal, yet its economic instability underscored the dangers confronting media organizations that challenge concentrated power. Truth-telling within corporate systems becomes economically precarious because profit structures reward sensationalism, ideological conformity, and political access rather than sustained critical investigation.

The broader significance of the propaganda model lies in its exposure of how democratic societies manufacture legitimacy while preserving the appearance of free discourse. Modern propaganda does not eliminate disagreement entirely. Instead, it organizes disagreement within carefully regulated boundaries that leave fundamental power structures untouched. Public debate becomes

theatrical rather than transformative. Citizens are encouraged to argue over personalities, scandals, and temporary controversies while systemic questions concerning ownership, economic inequality, militarism, and ideological control remain marginalized. The media system thus functions not simply to distribute information but to stabilize the emotional and intellectual conditions necessary for maintaining existing hierarchies. The enduring resonance of Herman and Chomsky's theory suggests that many individuals intuitively recognize the gap between official narratives and lived reality. The propaganda model remains influential because it provides a framework for understanding why mass communication in democratic societies often produces passivity, confusion, and ideological conformity despite unprecedented technological access to information. Its central warning is philosophical as much as political: a society flooded with communication may still remain imprisoned within systems of manufactured perception. Freedom of speech alone cannot guarantee freedom of thought when the structures determining visibility, legitimacy, and credibility are controlled by concentrated institutions of power. The struggle against propaganda therefore becomes inseparable from the struggle to reclaim independent consciousness itself.

Herman, E.S. and Chomsky, N. (1988) Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media. New York: Pantheon Books.

The Machinery of Consent: Filters Beyond the Visible

Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky in their 2009 interview for Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture revisit the foundations of the Propaganda Model while examining how systems of media control evolved during the decades following the publication of *Manufacturing Consent*. Their reflections reveal that the structure of propaganda did not disappear with technological change or the end of the Cold War. Instead, the mechanisms of ideological management adapted themselves to new political realities, preserving the same essential function: the shaping of public consciousness in ways favorable to elite power. The interview demonstrates that propaganda in democratic societies operates not through crude authoritarian censorship alone but through subtle institutional pressures embedded within corporate ownership, advertising dependence, selective sourcing, ideological framing, and market discipline. These forces establish invisible limits around acceptable discourse while maintaining the appearance of free debate and pluralism.

Herman and Chomsky argue that elite consensus becomes most visible during periods of imperial expansion or geopolitical conflict, when media institutions overwhelmingly reproduce official narratives and marginalize perspectives challenging state objectives. During the Vietnam War and the invasion of Iraq, mainstream journalism rarely questioned the legitimacy of military aggression itself. Debate was permitted only within restricted boundaries concerning strategy, efficiency, or political cost. Fundamental moral questions about domination, occupation, or imperial violence remained largely absent from public discussion. The media therefore did not simply fail accidentally. Their performance reflected structural alignment with state and corporate interests deeply rooted within the organization of modern communication systems. When military or economic agendas coincide with dominant class interests, consensus emerges naturally across institutional media because these organizations share the same ideological assumptions as the political and economic elites they depend upon. The interview further reinforces the enduring relevance of the five filters identified in the original Propaganda Model. Ownership has become even more concentrated through global mergers, deregulation, and weakened antitrust policies.

Large media conglomerates now possess unprecedented power to shape public narratives across multiple platforms simultaneously. This concentration transforms journalism into an extension of corporate power where profitability outweighs democratic responsibility. The advertising filter has similarly intensified. Media organizations increasingly prioritize content capable of attracting affluent audiences and protecting advertiser interests, reducing the space available for investigative reporting or radical critique. Information becomes subordinate to marketability. News no longer functions primarily as a civic necessity but as a commercial environment engineered to maximize audience retention and consumer behavior.

Sourcing also remains central to the manufacture of legitimacy. Journalists depend heavily upon official institutions, government agencies, military briefings, corporate spokespeople, and centralized news services because such sources provide continuous streams of accessible information. This dependence creates structural obedience. Reporters who aggressively challenge official narratives risk exclusion from privileged access, damaging their professional survival within competitive media systems. As a result, the perspectives of state and corporate authorities become normalized as objective truth while dissident voices appear irrational, marginal, or dangerous. The public encounters reality already filtered through institutional assumptions before alternative interpretations can even emerge. Flak, the organized punishment directed against dissenting media or journalists, has likewise intensified in modern political culture. Herman and Chomsky explain that criticism no longer originates only from governments or corporate groups but increasingly from internal media structures themselves. Election campaigns, nationalist sentiment, ideological polarization, and economic pressure all contribute to systems of discipline that encourage conformity and suppress deviation. Through lawsuits, public attacks, accusations of disloyalty, or professional marginalization, media workers internalize institutional boundaries without requiring direct censorship. Propaganda becomes most effective when individuals voluntarily police themselves in anticipation of punishment.

Although anti-communism no longer functions as the dominant ideological filter it once was during the Cold War, Herman and Chomsky emphasize that its structural role survives through new forms of fear and doctrinal control. Free market ideology, neoliberal rhetoric, and the language of anti-terrorism now perform similar functions by defining enemies, legitimizing state violence, and narrowing political imagination. The rhetoric surrounding the war on terror transformed global politics into a permanent atmosphere of fear where military expansion, surveillance, and restrictions on civil liberties could be justified as defensive necessities. Ideology adapts itself to historical conditions while preserving the same psychological function: the construction of symbolic threats capable of organizing public obedience. The interview also addresses accusations that the Propaganda Model is conspiratorial or overly deterministic. Herman and Chomsky reject these criticisms by arguing that propaganda emerges not from secret coordination but from institutional logic and shared interests. Corporate media do not require explicit commands because economic structures, professional incentives, and ideological assumptions naturally produce conformity. The system functions through normalization rather than overt coercion. Journalists often sincerely believe in their objectivity because the dominant assumptions shaping their worldview appear self-evident and natural. In this sense, propaganda is not merely deception imposed from above but a cultural environment shaping perception itself.

Their methodological approach further exposes the hidden structure of media bias through comparative analysis. By examining paired examples, Herman and Chomsky demonstrate how similar events receive radically different treatment depending on geopolitical interests. Violence committed by enemy states is magnified and moralized, while similar actions by allied

governments are minimized or rationalized. Elections in adversarial nations become symbols of corruption, whereas flawed democratic practices within allied states are treated as insignificant irregularities. Such comparisons reveal that propaganda often operates through selective emphasis rather than outright fabrication. Facts may remain technically accurate while their context, emotional framing, and visibility are manipulated to produce predetermined interpretations. The interview also explores the relevance of the Propaganda Model in relation to television and the internet. Television, because of its dependence on advertising and emotional immediacy, conforms strongly to the logic of propaganda. Its visual spectacle encourages simplification, emotional manipulation, and rapid consumption rather than critical reflection. The internet initially appeared to offer possibilities for decentralized communication and democratic participation. However, Herman and Chomsky argue that digital platforms gradually became absorbed into the same corporate structures governing traditional media. Advertising systems, algorithmic visibility, concentrated ownership, and platform monopolies transformed much of the internet into an extension of existing power relations. Although alternative voices can emerge online, their visibility and sustainability remain constrained by the broader economic and political environment.

Despite their severe critique, Herman and Chomsky express cautious optimism regarding forms of resistance. Independent journalism, community radio, public access broadcasting, and alternative digital networks demonstrate that propaganda systems are never completely totalizing. Human beings continue to search for spaces of intellectual autonomy even within heavily managed societies. Yet the authors insist that meaningful democratization of communication cannot occur without broader transformations of political and economic structures. Corporate media and elite power reinforce one another because they originate from the same institutional order. A genuinely pluralistic information environment therefore requires more than technological innovation; it demands profound changes in ownership, labor relations, democratic participation, and economic organization itself. The enduring power of the Propaganda Model lies in its exposure of how modern societies manufacture consent while preserving the appearance of freedom. The greatest achievement of propaganda is not forcing individuals to obey openly but shaping the symbolic environment within which obedience appears reasonable, natural, and voluntary. Herman and Chomsky reveal that control over language, framing, visibility, and legitimacy ultimately becomes control over political imagination itself. In such conditions, the struggle for democratic communication becomes inseparable from the struggle to reclaim the capacity for independent thought against systems designed to normalize submission through information abundance and ideological repetition.

Herman, E.S. and Chomsky, N. (2009) 'The Propaganda Model after 20 Years: Interview with Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky', Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture, 6(2), pp. 12–22.

The Invisible Parliament: Corporate Rituals of Manufactured Truth

Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* present the propaganda model as a structural explanation for the behavior of modern corporate media, arguing that mass communication systems in the United States function not primarily as instruments of democratic enlightenment but as mechanisms that stabilize and reproduce elite power. Their analysis rejects the comforting liberal assumption that the press naturally serves the public interest through neutral and independent reporting. Instead, they describe a system in which the dominant institutions of communication are deeply integrated into

the economic and political structures of society, operating within networks of ownership, advertising dependence, ideological discipline, and institutional loyalty. The media therefore become less a forum for open democratic discourse than a managed environment in which acceptable opinion is carefully organized and dissent remains confined within narrow boundaries. Propaganda within this framework does not rely mainly upon overt censorship or authoritarian commands. It functions through invisible structural pressures that shape what journalists consider important, credible, or even imaginable. Editors, reporters, experts, and commentators internalize the values of the institutions surrounding them until ideological conformity appears natural and objective rather than imposed.

The propaganda model identifies several interconnected filters through which information must pass before reaching the public consciousness. Ownership stands at the center of this process because modern media institutions are massive corporations embedded within broader systems of finance, investment, and global commerce. These organizations are driven fundamentally by profitability and market expansion rather than civic obligation. Herman and Chomsky explain that earlier periods allowed for more radical and labor-oriented forms of journalism because media ownership had not yet become fully concentrated within enormous corporate conglomerates. Over time, however, increasing centralization transformed the press into a highly disciplined commercial industry. Media companies merged into transnational empires controlling newspapers, television networks, film studios, publishing houses, and digital platforms simultaneously. This concentration intensified the alignment between media narratives and elite interests because the same economic groups influencing politics also came to dominate the channels through which political reality was interpreted. The shift from family ownership toward professional managerial systems further strengthened market discipline. Executives became increasingly accountable to investors, shareholders, and profitability metrics, reducing tolerance for investigative journalism capable of threatening corporate interests. Information itself became subordinate to commercial imperatives.

Advertising functions as another decisive filter because the survival of media organizations depends heavily upon attracting advertisers seeking affluent and politically passive audiences. Herman and Chomsky demonstrate that audiences themselves become commodities sold to advertisers rather than citizens served through journalism. News therefore assumes a secondary role within a larger commercial environment designed to maximize consumer engagement and protect corporate relationships. Stories challenging powerful industries, exposing systemic exploitation, or questioning dominant economic structures risk alienating advertisers and undermining revenue streams. This creates forms of indirect censorship operating without explicit prohibition. Journalists may believe themselves free while economic realities silently narrow the boundaries of acceptable discourse. Public debate survives only insofar as it does not threaten the institutional conditions sustaining corporate profitability.

The sourcing filter deepens this structural dependence by establishing symbiotic relationships between media institutions and official centers of authority. Governments, military agencies, corporate spokespeople, intelligence organizations, and elite think tanks become the primary suppliers of news because they possess the resources necessary to provide constant flows of information. Journalists working within competitive deadlines depend upon these institutions for access, legitimacy, and professional survival. Herman and Chomsky argue that this dependency creates a moral hierarchy where official narratives automatically acquire credibility while dissident perspectives appear marginal or unreliable. Reporters who aggressively challenge dominant institutions risk exclusion from privileged access and damage to their careers. As a result,

journalism increasingly reproduces the worldview of state and corporate power while presenting itself as neutral observation. Facts themselves become inseparable from the institutional structures producing them.

Flak operates as a disciplinary mechanism ensuring conformity through organized punishment directed against media outlets or individuals who stray beyond acceptable limits. Flak can emerge through lawsuits, political attacks, advertiser pressure, lobbying campaigns, orchestrated public outrage, or accusations designed to discredit dissenting voices. Herman and Chomsky emphasize that such pressures cultivate self-censorship within journalistic culture itself. Reporters internalize institutional fears and adapt their behavior preemptively to avoid professional consequences. Propaganda thus becomes most effective when direct coercion is unnecessary because obedience has already been psychologically absorbed into organizational routines and career expectations.

The ideological filter originally centered upon anti-communism during the Cold War, where communism served as a universal symbol of danger capable of legitimizing military intervention, repression, and political conformity. Herman and Chomsky explain that ideological fear functions not simply to attack external enemies but to discipline domestic populations by narrowing political imagination. Any challenge to dominant economic arrangements could be associated with chaos, dictatorship, or national betrayal. Although anti-communism later declined in prominence, its structural role survived through new ideological narratives involving terrorism, neoliberal globalization, and permanent security threats. Modern propaganda continually requires symbolic enemies through which authority justifies itself. Fear becomes a political resource shaping emotional obedience while suppressing critical reflection.

One of the most revealing dimensions of the propaganda model emerges through the distinction between worthy and unworthy victims. Herman and Chomsky demonstrate that the media distribute sympathy selectively according to geopolitical interests. Victims harmed by enemy states receive extensive emotional coverage, personalized narratives, and moral outrage because such representations reinforce official foreign policy objectives. By contrast, victims suffering under regimes allied with the United States are marginalized, depersonalized, or ignored entirely. The difference lies not in the scale of suffering but in its political usefulness. Atrocities committed by enemies become symbols of evil requiring intervention, while comparable violence by allies disappears beneath silence or euphemistic language. This selective morality reveals how propaganda shapes ethical perception itself. Human suffering acquires visibility only when it serves strategic interests. The media's selective use of the term genocide further illustrates this ideological manipulation. Herman and Chomsky note that atrocities committed by adversarial governments are frequently described through morally absolute language, whereas similar or greater crimes carried out by allied regimes rarely receive equivalent condemnation. Kosovo became a site of intense moral rhetoric because it aligned with Western geopolitical narratives, while the suffering of Kurds under Turkish repression or the devastation of East Timor under Indonesian occupation remained comparatively marginalized. Language itself becomes politically instrumentalized. Words lose universal ethical meaning and instead function as tools for organizing consent around strategic objectives.

The propaganda model extends beyond war reporting into domestic politics, labor relations, environmental regulation, and economic policy. Media institutions routinely frame debates within

limits favorable to corporate and investor interests. Political parties dependent upon large financial backers avoid challenging fundamental economic structures, while media coverage reinforces the assumption that alternatives to neoliberal capitalism are unrealistic or dangerous. Public support for reducing military budgets, regulating corporations, or strengthening labor protections receives minimal attention because such positions threaten dominant economic arrangements. Environmental concerns are frequently reframed as irrational panic, while corporate influence over regulatory agencies remains obscured. Labor struggles are marginalized through underreporting or narratives portraying unions as disruptive obstacles to economic efficiency. In every case, propaganda functions less through direct falsehood than through selective emphasis, omission, and framing. The Vietnam War stands as one of the clearest examples of this process. Despite overwhelming evidence that the United States engaged in aggressive intervention and devastating violence, mainstream media persistently framed the war as a tragic but fundamentally moral effort to defend South Vietnam. The immense suffering inflicted upon Vietnamese civilians through bombing campaigns, chemical warfare, and military occupation remained secondary to narratives emphasizing American sacrifice and geopolitical anxiety. Even retrospective discussions of the war often focused on the trauma experienced by the United States while minimizing the destruction inflicted upon Vietnam itself. Similarly, figures such as Pol Pot were portrayed as embodiments of absolute evil, while leaders allied with Western interests, despite involvement in mass killings, received far softer treatment. Moral judgment became inseparable from geopolitical alignment.

The propaganda model also illuminates the treatment of protest movements opposing institutions such as the WTO, IMF, and World Bank. Demonstrations challenging global economic inequality were frequently represented through images of disorder, violence, and chaos, while police repression and the substantive grievances motivating the protests received far less attention. Dissent itself became delegitimized through spectacle. Protesters were transformed into threats against public order rather than participants in democratic struggle. Such framing protects the legitimacy of prevailing economic systems by reducing criticism to emotional disruption rather than rational political opposition. Herman and Chomsky ultimately argue that the propaganda model remains perhaps even more relevant than when first introduced because media centralization, globalization, and commercial pressures have intensified dramatically. The erosion of public broadcasting and the expansion of transnational conglomerates further diminish spaces for independent journalism and democratic communication. Yet the authors also emphasize the necessity of resistance through grassroots media initiatives, community broadcasting, independent digital platforms, and alternative forms of public discourse capable of challenging concentrated informational power. The struggle against propaganda is therefore inseparable from the broader struggle to preserve democratic consciousness itself. In societies saturated with communication technologies, domination increasingly depends not upon suppressing information entirely but upon controlling its visibility, interpretation, emotional framing, and moral legitimacy. The greatest danger described by the propaganda model is not merely deception but the gradual normalization of systems in which citizens mistake managed perception for freedom of thought.

Herman, E.S. and Chomsky, N. (2002) Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media. New York: Pantheon Books.

The Theatre of Obedience: Language Beneath the Masks of Neutrality

Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky in the preface to *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* outline a theory of modern communication in which the mass media

function not as neutral observers of political life but as institutional mechanisms that organize consent for dominant systems of power. Their argument challenges one of the foundational myths of liberal democracy: the belief that journalism naturally serves truth, independence, and public accountability. According to Herman and Chomsky, the press operates within a guided framework established by economic concentration, political influence, institutional dependency, and ideological discipline. The result is not always direct censorship in the crude authoritarian sense but a more sophisticated process through which the limits of acceptable thought are silently established before public discussion even begins. The modern citizen therefore encounters a carefully managed version of reality where the range of permissible interpretation remains restricted by the needs of political and economic elites. Propaganda in this environment does not appear openly as propaganda because it functions through routines, assumptions, professional norms, and institutional loyalties that present themselves as natural, objective, and inevitable.

The democratic ideal imagines the media as a guardian against concentrated power, a force capable of exposing corruption and protecting public reason from manipulation. Herman and Chomsky argue, however, that the institutional structure of mass communication makes such independence deeply problematic. Ownership patterns, market discipline, advertising dependence, and political alliances shape journalistic behavior long before any article reaches publication. Editors and reporters internalize assumptions regarding what constitutes responsible reporting, credible evidence, and legitimate political debate. The most effective propaganda systems do not require constant external coercion because journalists adapt themselves voluntarily to the expectations of the institutions surrounding them. Self-censorship emerges naturally within environments where professional advancement depends upon conformity to dominant frameworks of interpretation. News selection, emphasis, omission, and framing therefore become political acts disguised as objective reporting.

The authors reject accusations that their institutional critique constitutes a conspiracy theory. They argue instead that propaganda is generated through systemic processes similar to those governing market behavior itself. Individuals operating within the same institutional conditions develop similar assumptions because they are shaped by common incentives and constraints. Government officials, corporate leaders, and media executives frequently arrive at aligned conclusions not because they secretly coordinate every decision but because they inhabit interconnected structures of power sharing compatible interests and ideological orientations. A guided market system emerges where a relatively small number of influential actors define the premises within which public discourse unfolds. Journalists and commentators may perceive themselves as independent, yet the boundaries of acceptable debate remain tightly regulated through institutional pressures invisible to those operating inside them. Herman and Chomsky emphasize that the media are not perfectly unified on every issue. Tactical disagreements frequently occur among elites, and these conflicts can create the appearance of pluralism within public debate. Yet even intense controversy usually remains confined within limits that protect the legitimacy of underlying political and economic arrangements. Debate may concern the efficiency of foreign intervention, the management of economic policy, or the methods of state power, but perspectives challenging the legitimacy of imperial structures or systemic inequality rarely gain sustained visibility. The example of Nicaragua demonstrates this pattern clearly. During periods of U.S. hostility toward the Nicaraguan government, media discussions often revolved around the effectiveness of intervention strategies while ignoring evidence undermining official narratives. Questions concerning Nicaragua's social reforms, democratic achievements, or the legality of U.S.

aggression remained largely marginalized. The structure of discourse itself predetermined which forms of criticism could safely appear.

This process reflects a deeper philosophical condition concerning the relationship between propaganda and visibility. Jacques Ellul argued that propaganda cannot reveal the authentic intentions of those directing it because such exposure would subject power to genuine public scrutiny. Herman and Chomsky extend this insight by showing how governments and dominant institutions establish the frameworks through which reality becomes intelligible. Facts alone do not determine public understanding. Information acquires meaning through repetition, emphasis, placement, emotional framing, and contextual association. A politically inconvenient truth buried on the back pages of a newspaper does not possess the same social force as a headline repeated continuously across major media platforms. The issue is therefore not whether certain facts technically appear in public circulation but whether they are granted sufficient visibility and interpretive weight to influence collective consciousness. The Vietnam War provides one of the clearest illustrations of this mechanism. Even when dissent regarding the war began to emerge within sections of the American public, media institutions largely preserved the underlying assumptions of official policy. Criticism focused mainly on tactical failures, strategic miscalculations, or the costs imposed upon the United States rather than questioning the legitimacy of the intervention itself. Perspectives describing the war as imperial aggression or emphasizing the immense suffering inflicted upon Vietnamese civilians remained peripheral. Occasional pessimistic commentary or isolated revelations of misconduct allowed defenders of the system to portray the press as adversarial and independent, yet these limited moments of criticism did little to challenge the dominant narrative framework sustaining state policy. Propaganda survives most effectively when selective criticism creates the illusion of openness while leaving fundamental structures untouched.

Herman and Chomsky also highlight the importance of framing in shaping public morality. The media's constant emphasis on victims associated with enemy states produces emotional narratives reinforcing ideological hostility and legitimizing militarization or intervention. At the same time, the silence surrounding victims harmed by allied governments or domestic policies prevents these forms of suffering from entering collective awareness with comparable intensity. The difference lies not in the scale of suffering but in its political utility. Human pain becomes selectively visible according to strategic interests. Through repetition and omission, propaganda transforms moral perception itself. Citizens learn which lives deserve outrage, which atrocities require action, and which tragedies must remain invisible in order to preserve national myths and institutional legitimacy. The propaganda model proposed by Herman and Chomsky therefore extends beyond journalism into the deeper architecture of democratic society. Modern systems of communication do not simply distribute information; they regulate the symbolic environment within which political imagination becomes possible. Citizens may believe themselves free because multiple media outlets exist and formal censorship appears absent, yet the range of permissible thought remains structured by concentrated ownership, institutional dependency, and ideological discipline. The greatest achievement of propaganda is not convincing individuals to believe obvious falsehoods but shaping the categories through which reality itself is interpreted. In such conditions, domination becomes psychological as much as political because people internalize the assumptions necessary for their own management.

The preface ultimately presents propaganda not as an occasional abuse of media power but as a structural feature of modern mass communication under corporate capitalism. The concentration of informational authority within interconnected institutions creates a public sphere increasingly

governed by market logic and elite priorities rather than democratic participation. Herman and Chomsky warn that the appearance of freedom can coexist with profound systems of ideological control when the mechanisms organizing perception remain hidden beneath the language of professionalism, neutrality, and objectivity. Their analysis exposes how modern societies manufacture obedience not through visible repression alone but through carefully regulated forms of discourse that shape what populations are capable of imagining, questioning, and resisting. The struggle for democratic communication therefore becomes inseparable from the struggle to reclaim independent consciousness from institutions designed to normalize submission while preserving the comforting illusion of intellectual freedom.

Herman, E.S. and Chomsky, N. (1988) Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media. New York: Pantheon Books.

The Cathedral of Information: Filters of Silence and Obedience

Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* describe the modern media system as a vast institutional mechanism whose purpose extends far beyond the simple communication of information. The mass media entertain, educate, distract, and shape emotional responses, but above all they integrate individuals into the dominant political and economic structures of society. In societies marked by concentrated wealth and severe inequalities of power, such integration cannot occur spontaneously or innocently. It requires a continuous process of ideological management through which populations gradually internalize values favorable to existing systems of authority. Herman and Chomsky call this process a propaganda model because the media function not merely as neutral transmitters of facts but as institutions that systematically filter reality according to the interests of those who possess economic and political dominance. The modern citizen is therefore surrounded not simply by information but by carefully structured interpretations of reality that shape public perception before conscious analysis even begins. Propaganda within liberal democracies differs from the openly coercive propaganda of totalitarian systems because it operates invisibly through routines, institutional loyalties, professional assumptions, and economic pressures that appear natural and objective. The result is a form of ideological discipline hidden beneath the language of freedom, professionalism, and democratic pluralism.

Herman and Chomsky argue that propaganda becomes most difficult to recognize precisely in societies where the media appear independent, competitive, and privately owned. In authoritarian states, censorship is explicit and therefore visible. The public can easily observe the direct intervention of government authority into communication systems. In corporate democracies, however, the mechanisms of control are embedded within the structure of the media themselves. Newspapers and broadcasters occasionally expose scandals, criticize politicians, and investigate corruption, thereby reinforcing the illusion of an adversarial press committed to public accountability. Yet these isolated acts of criticism obscure a deeper pattern of conformity concerning the fundamental assumptions of political and economic life. The media may debate tactical disagreements between elites while excluding perspectives that challenge the legitimacy of concentrated corporate power, imperial policy, or systemic inequality itself. What remains largely invisible is the enormous imbalance in access to communication systems and the way wealth determines visibility, legitimacy, and authority. The propaganda model therefore focuses on how economic power shapes the production of news through institutional filters that determine which realities become visible and which remain marginalized or entirely excluded from public

consciousness. The first and perhaps most fundamental filter concerns the size, concentrated ownership, wealth, and profit orientation of dominant media corporations. Herman and Chomsky explain that modern media organizations require immense financial investment and operate as large-scale corporate enterprises deeply integrated into broader economic systems. Ownership concentration ensures that a relatively small number of institutions control the overwhelming majority of informational output available to society. These corporations are accountable not to democratic communities but to investors, shareholders, directors, and financial markets demanding constant profitability and expansion. Journalism therefore becomes inseparable from the interests of corporate capitalism itself. Media organizations survive only by maintaining favorable relationships with the same political and economic institutions they are expected to scrutinize critically. This structural dependence creates forms of ideological conformity far more powerful than direct censorship because journalists internalize the assumptions necessary for institutional survival. Alternative ways of interpreting reality gradually become unimaginable within environments governed by commercial discipline.

The historical development of the press in Britain and the United States reveals how market mechanisms systematically eliminated radical and working-class journalism. Herman and Chomsky discuss how the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of an independent working-class press that helped develop class consciousness and encouraged organized resistance against inequality. These publications threatened ruling elites because they offered alternative frameworks for understanding social conditions and collective political action. Governments initially responded through coercive measures such as taxes, libel laws, security bonds, and legal restrictions designed to increase operational costs and suppress dissenting publications. Over time, however, industrialization and technological expansion accomplished the same objective more effectively through market forces alone. As newspaper production became increasingly expensive and technologically sophisticated, independent radical outlets could no longer compete financially with large commercial enterprises. The market itself became an instrument of ideological control, rewarding media institutions aligned with dominant economic interests while marginalizing voices lacking access to capital. Advertising functions as the second major filter and transforms audiences into commodities sold to corporate sponsors. Herman and Chomsky emphasize that media organizations do not primarily sell news to the public. Instead, they sell audiences to advertisers seeking profitable consumers. This economic arrangement fundamentally reshapes the priorities of journalism because media survival depends upon maintaining relationships with powerful commercial interests. Content threatening advertisers or challenging consumer capitalism risks financial punishment through lost sponsorship and declining revenue. Journalism therefore becomes subordinate to the requirements of marketability and audience management. Even without direct intervention, reporters and editors learn to avoid topics that may disrupt profitable relationships. Investigative reporting exposing systemic corporate abuse becomes economically dangerous within institutions dependent upon corporate financing. The result is a form of self-censorship embedded deeply within organizational culture. News remains formally free while structurally constrained by the imperatives of advertising and commercial survival.

The third filter concerns sourcing. Modern journalism depends heavily upon governments, military institutions, corporations, think tanks, and officially sanctioned experts because these institutions provide continuous streams of inexpensive and authoritative information. Journalists operating within competitive deadlines require accessible sources capable of supplying reliable material quickly and consistently. Official institutions therefore become privileged creators of reality itself. Reporters who challenge dominant narratives too aggressively risk losing access to vital

information channels and damaging their professional careers. Over time, media workers internalize the assumptions and priorities of the institutions upon which they depend. Government officials, corporate spokespeople, and elite experts acquire automatic credibility while dissident perspectives appear irrational, emotional, or extremist. This structural dependency creates what Herman and Chomsky describe as a moral hierarchy where institutional authority defines the boundaries of legitimate public discourse. The fourth filter, flak, functions as a disciplinary system punishing media institutions or individuals who deviate from dominant narratives. Flak may take the form of lawsuits, orchestrated public outrage, political attacks, lobbying campaigns, advertiser pressure, accusations of bias, or threats against professional reputation. These mechanisms cultivate fear and encourage conformity by making dissent economically and socially costly. Journalists learn to anticipate institutional retaliation before challenging powerful interests too directly. The propaganda system therefore becomes self-regulating because obedience has already been internalized psychologically within professional culture. External coercion becomes unnecessary once individuals adapt themselves voluntarily to the expectations surrounding them.

The final filter identified by Herman and Chomsky is anti-communism, which during the Cold War operated as a national ideology organizing public fear and political conformity. Anti-communism served not merely as opposition to a foreign system but as a broader symbolic framework dividing the world into forces of legitimacy and existential danger. Any movement challenging dominant economic arrangements could be associated with chaos, dictatorship, or treason. This ideological structure justified military expansion, foreign intervention, domestic repression, and the narrowing of political imagination. Although historical conditions later shifted, the underlying function of ideological fear remained intact through new narratives concerning terrorism, national security, and global instability. Propaganda continuously requires enemies capable of mobilizing emotional obedience while suppressing critical reflection about systems of power themselves.

Herman and Chomsky ultimately demonstrate that these filters operate together to produce a carefully managed form of public reality. Information reaching society has already passed through layers of economic pressure, institutional dependency, ideological framing, and political discipline. Yet because these mechanisms function structurally rather than openly, media professionals often sincerely believe themselves objective and independent. Propaganda succeeds most effectively when it becomes invisible, shaping not only what people know but the categories through which they interpret existence itself. The media therefore do not merely report events; they participate in constructing the symbolic environment within which citizens understand morality, legitimacy, danger, and truth. In this sense, the propaganda model reveals that modern systems of communication are inseparable from systems of social control. The struggle for democratic freedom consequently requires more than formal free speech protections. It demands a transformation of the institutional structures shaping perception itself, because societies saturated with information can still remain imprisoned within carefully manufactured realities designed to preserve the power of dominant elites.

Herman, E.S. and Chomsky, N. (1988) Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media. New York: Pantheon Books.

The Commerce of Truth / Rituals of Obedient Speech

Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* continue their examination of the propaganda model by demonstrating that the

modern media system is governed not simply by the direct ownership of information but by a broader network of economic and ideological controls that shape the very conditions under which journalism becomes possible. Their argument reveals that propaganda in liberal democracies does not operate mainly through crude censorship or visible state repression. Instead, it functions through institutional structures that gradually discipline journalists, editors, and media corporations into reproducing the worldview of dominant political and economic interests while maintaining the illusion of objectivity and freedom. Advertising, sourcing, flak, and ideological fear form interconnected mechanisms that transform communication into a system of social management. The public therefore encounters not an open marketplace of independent ideas but a carefully filtered symbolic environment in which certain assumptions become normalized while alternative perspectives are marginalized, weakened, or rendered invisible. The genius of this system lies precisely in its invisibility. Citizens living within formally democratic societies rarely perceive propaganda because it disguises itself as professionalism, neutrality, balance, and market efficiency. The boundaries of permissible discourse are established structurally long before explicit censorship becomes necessary.

Advertising functions as one of the most powerful mechanisms in this process because it reorganizes the economic foundation of the media themselves. Herman and Chomsky explain that newspapers originally depended far more heavily upon direct sales revenue from readers. The rise of advertising fundamentally altered this relationship by allowing publications capable of attracting advertisers to lower their selling prices far below actual production costs. This created an immense competitive imbalance. Newspapers supported by advertising could dominate markets regardless of whether rival publications possessed more loyal readers or superior journalistic integrity. Advertising therefore evolved into an invisible licensing system determining which publications would survive economically and which would be pushed toward marginality or collapse. Radical newspapers, labor-oriented publications, and working-class journals were particularly vulnerable because advertisers sought audiences with purchasing power rather than politically engaged readers interested in structural criticism. Media organizations serving poorer or oppositional communities became commercially undesirable even when their circulation remained impressive. The market itself became a mechanism for suppressing dissent without requiring open political repression. Herman and Chomsky emphasize that advertising does not merely provide financial support for media institutions. It fundamentally reshapes their priorities and cultural orientation. The audience ceases to exist primarily as a democratic public seeking information and instead becomes a commodity sold to corporate sponsors. Media organizations increasingly design their content, programming, and editorial strategies around attracting affluent demographics valuable to advertisers. This commercial pressure gradually transforms journalism into a branch of consumer capitalism. News becomes subordinate to the emotional atmosphere required for successful advertising and profitable audience management. Subjects likely to disturb consumers or threaten corporate interests become economically risky. Critical reporting on environmental destruction, labor exploitation, militarism, monopolistic practices, or structural inequality may alienate advertisers and destabilize the commercial environment upon which media institutions depend. As a result, journalists internalize market logic as part of professional common sense. Self-censorship emerges not through visible commands but through adaptation to financial realities that reward ideological conformity and punish disruptive critique.

This transformation also alters the moral psychology of journalism itself. Reporters and editors operating within advertising-driven institutions learn to perceive commercially acceptable narratives as naturally objective and responsible. Radical alternatives become increasingly

unimaginable because they conflict with the economic structure sustaining the media environment. Herman and Chomsky show that propaganda functions most effectively when individuals sincerely believe themselves independent while unconsciously reproducing the assumptions required by concentrated economic power. Modern propaganda therefore operates less through direct lying than through the selective shaping of visibility, legitimacy, and emotional emphasis. Certain stories receive endless repetition while others disappear into silence. Certain forms of suffering become morally urgent while others remain politically invisible. Through these patterns of emphasis and omission, the media shape not only what populations know but the categories through which they interpret social reality itself. The third filter, sourcing, deepens this structural dependence by establishing symbiotic relationships between media organizations and institutions possessing political and economic authority. Herman and Chomsky explain that journalism requires constant streams of reliable information delivered under strict deadlines and financial constraints. Independent investigation is expensive, time-consuming, and institutionally dangerous. Governments, corporations, military agencies, police departments, and officially recognized experts therefore become indispensable suppliers of news because they possess the resources necessary to provide regular, organized, and apparently authoritative information. Journalists concentrate around bureaucratic centers such as the White House, the Pentagon, corporate headquarters, and governmental agencies because these institutions generate continuous flows of material suitable for immediate publication. The relationship becomes mutually reinforcing: official institutions receive platforms for shaping public narratives, while media organizations obtain inexpensive content capable of sustaining daily production schedules.

Mark Fishman's concept of "bureaucratic affinity" helps explain why this relationship becomes structurally inevitable. Large bureaucracies communicate most efficiently with other bureaucracies because they share organizational logic, professional routines, and institutional assumptions. Journalists working within corporate media systems gradually internalize the perspectives of official sources because those perspectives arrive wrapped in the language of expertise, authority, and legitimacy. The ideology of objectivity further reinforces this dependence. Relying upon government officials, corporate representatives, military spokespeople, and elite experts protects reporters from accusations of irresponsibility or bias. Information originating from recognized institutions appears credible precisely because institutional power itself is mistaken for truth. Alternative voices lacking comparable bureaucratic support are marginalized regardless of factual accuracy because they appear insufficiently authoritative within the professional culture of journalism. Herman and Chomsky emphasize that dominant institutions possess enormous informational infrastructures dwarfing the resources available to dissident organizations or grassroots movements. Agencies such as the Pentagon maintain vast public-relations systems employing thousands of specialists dedicated to managing media narratives through press releases, briefings, reports, and carefully staged events. Corporations and governments invest immense sums into communication strategies designed specifically to shape public perception. By contrast, labor unions, community activists, environmental groups, antiwar organizations, and marginalized communities possess limited access to comparable institutional platforms. The result is a profound asymmetry in visibility itself. Official narratives saturate the public sphere not necessarily because they are more truthful but because they possess greater material capacity for dissemination. Propaganda therefore emerges from inequality in communicative power as much as from explicit ideological intention.

The fourth filter, flak, functions as a disciplinary system enforcing conformity through organized punishment directed against journalists or media institutions challenging dominant assumptions

too aggressively. Herman and Chomsky describe flak as negative responses ranging from lawsuits, petitions, and public attacks to advertiser pressure, congressional hearings, political campaigns, and orchestrated accusations of bias or disloyalty. Such attacks can impose severe financial, reputational, and institutional costs. Media organizations therefore learn to anticipate backlash and adapt their behavior preemptively. Self-censorship becomes rational professional conduct within environments where deviation threatens career stability and corporate profitability. Flak operates through both direct and indirect channels. Governments, corporations, regulatory agencies, and advertisers may openly pressure media organizations to alter coverage or issue corrections. At the same time, ideological monitoring groups create broader climates of intimidation by mobilizing political allies, shareholders, and segments of the public against journalists perceived as insufficiently loyal to dominant values. Herman and Chomsky discuss organizations such as Accuracy in Media and similar institutions specifically created to discipline media discourse and reinforce conservative political agendas. These organizations transform criticism itself into a weapon of ideological enforcement. Journalists learn that challenging militarism, corporate power, or nationalist assumptions may result in accusations of extremism, bias, or even treasonous sympathy with enemy forces. Propaganda thus sustains itself psychologically through fear long before overt repression becomes necessary.

The final filter explored by Herman and Chomsky is anticommunism, which they describe as a pervasive ideological framework functioning almost as a secular religion throughout the Cold War. Anticommunism provided dominant elites with a universal symbolic enemy capable of organizing public fear and legitimizing political authority. Any movement threatening concentrated wealth or proposing structural reform could be associated with communism and therefore treated as morally dangerous, irrational, or unpatriotic. This ideological climate fragmented labor movements, weakened socialist organizations, justified military interventions, and normalized support for authoritarian regimes aligned with Western economic interests. Anticommunism transformed dissent into suspicion and criticism into betrayal. Citizens were encouraged to perceive alternatives to capitalist orthodoxy not as legitimate political possibilities but as existential threats to civilization itself. Historical examples reveal how this ideological mechanism repeatedly justified intervention and repression. Herman and Chomsky discuss the case of Juan Bosch in the Dominican Republic, whose progressive reforms and openness toward radical political participation provoked hostility from the United States despite his democratic legitimacy. Similar accusations of communist influence were used globally to undermine social movements, justify military coups, and support counterrevolutionary violence. Anticommunism therefore functioned less as a coherent analysis of geopolitical reality than as a psychological instrument for narrowing political imagination. By equating dissent with treason, the ideology created cultural environments in which conformity became synonymous with patriotism and obedience appeared morally necessary.

Herman and Chomsky ultimately demonstrate that these filters operate together continuously, producing a media environment structurally aligned with dominant systems of power. Advertising disciplines journalism economically, sourcing privileges official authority, flak punishes deviation, and ideological fear organizes emotional obedience. Together they create a communication system where dissent survives only at the margins while elite perspectives acquire the appearance of objective truth. The propaganda model reveals that modern democratic societies may preserve formal liberties while simultaneously manufacturing ideological conformity through invisible institutional processes. Citizens surrounded by endless streams of information may still remain trapped within highly restricted frameworks of interpretation because the mechanisms

determining visibility, legitimacy, and emotional emphasis are concentrated within interconnected systems of political and economic power. The media therefore do not simply describe reality; they actively participate in constructing the symbolic environment through which populations understand morality, legitimacy, danger, and social possibility itself. The greatest triumph of propaganda lies not in convincing individuals to believe obvious lies but in shaping consciousness so thoroughly that the assumptions of power appear indistinguishable from ordinary common sense.

Herman, E.S. and Chomsky, N. (1988) Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media. New York: Pantheon Books.

The Hierarchy of Suffering / Rituals of Selective Compassion

Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* expand the propaganda model by demonstrating that the modern media system does not merely filter information mechanically but organizes an entire moral universe in which human suffering is classified according to political usefulness. Their analysis of dichotomization and propaganda campaigns reveals that the media create symbolic distinctions between “worthy” and “unworthy” victims, transforming journalism into a mechanism for directing emotional attention toward events that reinforce elite interests while suppressing or minimizing suffering associated with allied powers or domestic institutions. The five filters previously identified—ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak, and ideological control—do not simply determine which facts appear in newspapers or television broadcasts. They shape the emotional architecture of public consciousness itself. Through patterns of repetition, omission, framing, and selective outrage, the media teach populations whose pain deserves compassion and whose suffering must remain politically invisible. Propaganda therefore functions not merely through lies but through the management of moral visibility. Certain atrocities become permanent symbols of evil requiring endless remembrance, while equally horrific crimes vanish from collective memory because acknowledging them would threaten strategic alliances, economic interests, or ideological assumptions sustaining dominant systems of power.

Herman and Chomsky explain that information originating from dissidents, labor activists, independent human-rights organizations, or marginalized communities enters the media system at a structural disadvantage because such voices lack institutional legitimacy and financial resources. Official sources connected to governments, military agencies, corporate institutions, and allied elites pass easily through the filtering process because they already satisfy the requirements of credibility established by the media system itself. Reports concerning the torture of political prisoners, attacks upon unions, or repression within allied states therefore receive limited attention because pursuing such stories demands costly investigation, reliance upon unofficial sources, and confrontation with institutions possessing the power to generate severe flak. The example of Turkey following the military regime established in 1980 demonstrates this process clearly. Turkey occupied a strategically valuable position within the geopolitical interests of the United States. The regime supported aggressive anticommunism, welcomed foreign investment, suppressed labor movements, and aligned itself closely with American foreign policy objectives. Because of this alliance, media organizations possessed little institutional incentive to investigate Turkish violence against dissidents or workers. Journalists attempting to expose such abuses would face not only financial and professional difficulties in gathering independent evidence but also likely retaliation from government officials, business interests, and organized ideological groups

committed to defending the alliance. Consequently, the victims of Turkish repression became structurally “unworthy” within the symbolic economy of the media. Their suffering existed materially yet remained politically marginalized because it disrupted dominant strategic narratives. The treatment of Poland during roughly the same historical period reveals the opposite side of this dichotomization process. Human-rights abuses committed within communist Poland received extensive media attention because they aligned perfectly with the ideological objectives of the Reagan administration and influential sectors of American corporate power. Dissidents in Poland became morally elevated figures whose suffering symbolized the alleged barbarity of Soviet influence and the moral superiority of Western capitalism. Information concerning repression in Poland could be obtained directly from official American sources, syndicated commentators, and elite institutions without requiring costly independent investigation or risking accusations of ideological irresponsibility. Journalists covering these stories encountered institutional encouragement rather than punishment because the narrative served elite geopolitical interests. Herman and Chomsky emphasize that the media rarely explain openly why one victim becomes globally celebrated while another disappears into obscurity. The distinction emerges “naturally” through the operation of the filtering system itself. The propaganda model therefore reveals that modern journalism constructs an implicit moral commandment: concentrate emotional energy upon the crimes of enemies while minimizing or ignoring the crimes of allies.

This selective compassion transforms the media into an apparatus for organizing public morality according to political utility. Worthy victims receive extensive biographies, emotional imagery, dramatic headlines, investigative urgency, and repeated symbolic memorialization. Their suffering becomes universalized as evidence of evil requiring immediate response. Unworthy victims, by contrast, are depersonalized, abstracted, or ignored entirely regardless of the scale of violence inflicted upon them. Herman and Chomsky show that propaganda does not merely distort factual accuracy; it disciplines emotional perception itself. The public learns to react passionately to certain atrocities while remaining largely indifferent to comparable crimes committed by governments aligned with dominant Western interests. Through these asymmetries, the media construct a world where morality appears objective even though it is filtered continuously through geopolitical calculation. The authors further explain that stories concerning worthy victims frequently become the foundation for large-scale propaganda campaigns whenever they provide strategic advantages for political or economic elites. When governments, corporations, and major media institutions identify narratives capable of mobilizing public hostility against designated enemies, these stories receive relentless amplification across newspapers, television networks, political speeches, and public commentary. The Soviet destruction of Korean Airlines Flight 007 in 1983 represents one of the clearest examples discussed by Herman and Chomsky. The incident generated enormous emotional outrage throughout Western media, which portrayed the Soviet Union as uniquely brutal and irrational while simultaneously strengthening support for military expansion and aggressive Cold War policies. Official institutions openly acknowledged that worldwide condemnation of the Soviet Union had strengthened strategic American objectives. The tragedy became politically useful because it reinforced ideological hostility toward an enemy state and helped justify expanded militarization.

The contrast with the media response to Israel’s destruction of a Libyan civilian airliner in 1973 exposes the selective logic underlying propaganda campaigns. Although civilians died under similarly tragic circumstances, the incident failed to provoke comparable moral hysteria because Israel occupied the position of a strategic ally within Western geopolitical frameworks. Herman and Chomsky point out that major newspapers treated the event with restraint and quickly

discouraged prolonged public debate regarding responsibility. The New York Times even argued that no useful purpose would be served by continuing acrimonious discussion concerning the attack. This statement reveals the deeper logic of propaganda itself. Outrage becomes permissible only when it serves established political interests. The Soviet action was considered useful because it intensified anti-Soviet sentiment and legitimized military policies. Criticism of Israel, however, threatened existing alliances and therefore lacked strategic utility. Propaganda campaigns are not driven primarily by universal ethical principles but by calculations concerning ideological and geopolitical advantage. Herman and Chomsky demonstrate that propaganda campaigns have repeatedly shaped modern political history by directing public consciousness away from structural inequality and toward emotionally charged external enemies. The Red Scare following World War I weakened labor organizing and radical movements demanding economic reform. Later anticommunist campaigns during the Truman and McCarthy periods strengthened the Cold War system, legitimized permanent militarization, and fragmented progressive coalitions associated with New Deal politics. Continuous focus upon Soviet dissidents, Cambodian atrocities under Pol Pot, and conspiratorial narratives such as the Bulgarian Connection helped weaken the “Vietnam syndrome” that had emerged after widespread public disillusionment with American foreign intervention. These campaigns simultaneously distracted attention from domestic wealth redistribution, corporate concentration, and the social consequences of neoliberal economic policies. Propaganda therefore serves a dual purpose: mobilizing hostility toward designated enemies while preventing critical examination of inequalities within domestic society itself.

The same structural logic explains why certain atrocities receive little sustained coverage despite immense human suffering. Herman and Chomsky discuss Cambodia during the Pol Pot era, noting that atrocities committed after the communist takeover received intense media attention because they reinforced anticommunist ideology and justified hostility toward revolutionary movements. Yet the massive destruction inflicted upon Cambodia through earlier American bombing campaigns remained comparatively invisible despite causing catastrophic civilian casualties. Similarly, the Indonesian massacres of 1965–66 and the invasion of East Timor received limited media attention because Indonesia functioned as a valuable ally within American geopolitical strategy. The victims of these campaigns became “unworthy” because acknowledging their suffering would implicate Western governments and corporate interests directly. Comparable patterns appeared in Chile, Guatemala, and other states where U.S.-supported regimes committed extensive human-rights abuses while continuing to receive diplomatic and economic support. Herman and Chomsky further explain that propaganda campaigns may originate from governments, private media institutions, or collaborations between both. Campaigns against Nicaragua, portrayals of Salvadoran elections as democratic achievements, and narratives surrounding Soviet aggression reflected clear governmental priorities amplified through media cooperation. Other campaigns, such as extensive publicity surrounding the crimes of Pol Pot or alleged KGB assassination plots, were initiated by private media corporations before receiving broader institutional support. Regardless of origin, such campaigns depend entirely upon the collaboration of mass media systems willing to sustain narratives favorable to elite interests through repetition, emotional framing, and selective visibility. Stories damaging to dominant institutions fade rapidly from public attention, while narratives reinforcing official ideology receive continuous reinforcement until dissenting interpretations become socially marginalized.

The propaganda model ultimately reveals that modern media systems function as mechanisms for constructing political reality through emotional selection. Friendly states are automatically assumed to desire peace, democracy, and truthfulness even when evidence suggests systematic

violence or deception. Enemy states are approached through permanent suspicion and moral hostility regardless of context. Investigative intensity becomes extraordinarily aggressive when examining the crimes of geopolitical rivals yet remarkably passive when confronting atrocities committed by allied governments or domestic institutions. These asymmetries shape not only headlines and editorial language but the deeper symbolic categories through which populations understand morality, legitimacy, and historical responsibility. Herman and Chomsky therefore expose propaganda not merely as a technique of misinformation but as a process through which power determines whose suffering matters, whose deaths deserve remembrance, and whose voices must disappear into silence so that the legitimacy of empire and concentrated wealth can remain intact beneath the comforting language of democratic freedom.

Herman, E.S. and Chomsky, N. (1988) Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media. New York: Pantheon Books.

The Illusion of the Watchdog / The Managed Voice of Democracy

Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* conclude their analysis by confronting one of the central myths sustaining liberal democratic society: the belief that the mass media function as an independent watchdog courageously defending the public against abuses of power. Defenders of the American press frequently invoke the First Amendment as evidence that journalism exists primarily to protect democratic freedom and enable citizens to challenge governmental authority. Figures such as Anthony Lewis of the *New York Times* argue that constitutional protections are not intended merely to shield reporters or publishers but to guarantee the public access to information necessary for meaningful participation in political life. Supreme Court justices and legal theorists similarly describe the press as a vital institution safeguarding democratic accountability by ensuring that those in authority remain exposed to criticism and public scrutiny. According to this idealized image, the media perform an indispensable civic role by uncovering hidden truths, exposing corruption, and defending the right of ordinary citizens to understand and influence the political process. An adversarial press appears essential to democracy itself because without independent journalism the public would lack the informational foundation necessary for rational self-government. Herman and Chomsky do not deny the importance of freedom of expression or the necessity of defending open communication against authoritarian control. Their argument is more unsettling because it questions whether the institutional structure of the American media actually fulfills the democratic role so frequently celebrated in political rhetoric. The propaganda model presented throughout their work suggests that the media indeed serve a societal function, but not primarily the function described in liberal mythology. Rather than enabling the public to exert meaningful control over political and economic institutions, the media largely operate to defend and reproduce the interests of dominant elites controlling wealth, state power, and institutional authority. This occurs not mainly through overt censorship but through the continuous selection of topics, framing of debates, filtering of information, and restriction of acceptable opinion within carefully managed ideological boundaries. The media appear pluralistic and independent because tactical disagreements among elites are often visible, yet the fundamental assumptions underlying political and economic power remain remarkably insulated from sustained critical scrutiny. Herman and Chomsky argue that the evidence examined throughout their study consistently confirms the expectations of the propaganda model and in many cases demonstrates an even deeper degree of institutional conformity than initially anticipated.

The mythology of the heroic press depends heavily upon selective historical memory. Defenders of American journalism often portray earlier generations of reporters as fearless investigators willing to challenge entrenched power regardless of political pressure. Yet Herman and Chomsky demonstrate that even during moments frequently celebrated as triumphs of media independence, the press remained structurally subordinated to the priorities of state and corporate power. The Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal are commonly cited as evidence that the media can act courageously against government authority. However, the authors reveal that these episodes illustrate not genuine independence but the limits within which dissent becomes permissible. During the final stages of the Vietnam War, for example, major media organizations began expressing criticism only after sections of the political elite themselves had concluded that the conflict was becoming too costly economically, militarily, and politically. Even at the height of supposed journalistic skepticism, the media continued to reproduce official assumptions concerning American intentions and legitimacy. During the Paris peace negotiations in 1973, journalists uncritically repeated state narratives and accepted governmental frameworks for interpreting the conflict despite overwhelming evidence of systematic destruction inflicted upon Vietnam. Criticism remained largely tactical rather than moral or structural. The legitimacy of American imperial power itself remained mostly unquestioned. The Watergate affair likewise reveals the narrow boundaries of acceptable media outrage. Mainstream narratives portray Watergate as proof that the press can expose executive corruption and force accountability upon political leaders. Herman and Chomsky argue instead that the scandal became significant primarily because Nixon's actions threatened powerful domestic interests and violated norms governing elite competition. The media focused intensely upon the break-in at Democratic headquarters and the abuse of political procedure because these actions directly affected influential sectors of the American establishment. At the same time, far more extensive violations committed by institutions such as the FBI, the intelligence services, and the broader national-security apparatus received comparatively limited scrutiny despite their deeper implications for civil liberties and democratic governance. Systematic repression directed against marginalized groups, antiwar activists, labor movements, and dissident communities rarely generated equivalent moral outrage because these victims lacked institutional power within elite political culture. Watergate therefore demonstrated not the independence of the media from concentrated power but the capacity of dominant groups to defend themselves when their own internal interests were threatened.

A similar pattern emerged during the Iran-Contra affair. Public controversy centered primarily upon the Reagan administration's circumvention of congressional authority and procedural norms rather than the broader moral and legal implications of American intervention in Central America. Herman and Chomsky point out that when the International Court of Justice ruled against the United States for unlawful aggression in Nicaragua, the decision generated relatively little sustained outrage within mainstream media or political institutions. The selective intensity of coverage reflected the priorities of dominant elites rather than universal principles concerning legality or human rights. Violations of democratic procedure became scandalous when they disrupted institutional balances among powerful actors, yet massive violence directed against weaker populations abroad often remained peripheral because acknowledging such realities threatened broader strategic interests. The propaganda model therefore explains not only what the media report but how emotional significance itself becomes politically organized. Throughout their analysis Herman and Chomsky repeatedly return to the idea that propaganda in democratic societies functions through highly selective visibility rather than simple suppression of all dissent. Citizens are exposed continuously to persuasive narratives generated from above while possessing limited ability to shape media agendas themselves. Media analyst W. Lance Bennett observed that

the public receives powerful ideological messages through concentrated communication systems without possessing equivalent channels through which to respond meaningfully. Ben Bagdikian similarly argued that the structural bias of corporate media deprives citizens of an authentic understanding of social reality because information is filtered through the assumptions and priorities of concentrated economic power. The audience is not treated primarily as a democratic public seeking truth but as a commodity delivered to advertisers and elite decision-makers. Journalism therefore becomes integrated into broader systems of political and commercial management.

Herman and Chomsky emphasize that the propaganda model rests upon a relatively simple but profound observation: private media institutions are large corporations operating within capitalist markets. Their primary customers are not ordinary readers or viewers but advertisers and influential elites capable of shaping investment, regulation, and institutional legitimacy. Media organizations consequently orient themselves toward the concerns and assumptions of those possessing economic and political power. The resulting portrayal of the world systematically reflects elite priorities because the survival of these institutions depends upon maintaining favorable relationships with dominant sectors of society. This structural dependence shapes not only editorial decisions but also the professional culture of journalism itself. Media personnel gradually adapt themselves to institutional expectations through career incentives, socialization, and internalized assumptions regarding professionalism and objectivity. Journalists unwilling or unable to conform to these expectations are frequently marginalized, dismissed as ideological, irresponsible, or lacking seriousness. The process of adaptation occurs subtly through professional routines rather than overt coercion. Reporters internalize the values necessary for institutional survival until conformity appears synonymous with balanced journalism. Although occasional dissenting voices emerge within mainstream media, these remain exceptions within a broader culture rewarding obedience to dominant frameworks of interpretation. Herman and Chomsky stress that the propaganda system functions most effectively when journalists sincerely believe themselves independent while unconsciously reproducing elite ideology through the ordinary practices of news production. Propaganda succeeds precisely because it disguises itself as neutrality. The media do not need to fabricate reality entirely; they merely shape emphasis, visibility, emotional framing, and the boundaries of legitimate discussion in ways favorable to concentrated power.

The broader implication of the propaganda model is deeply philosophical because it challenges the assumption that formal democratic freedoms necessarily guarantee meaningful public autonomy. Societies may preserve constitutional protections, electoral systems, and apparently free communication while simultaneously producing highly managed forms of political consciousness. Citizens surrounded by vast quantities of information may still remain unable to engage critically with structures of power because the symbolic environment through which reality is interpreted has already been filtered institutionally. The media become not guardians of democratic participation but mechanisms for manufacturing consent and stabilizing social hierarchy. Through selective reporting, controlled debate, ideological framing, and structural dependence upon corporate and state power, the press transforms complex political realities into narratives compatible with the interests of dominant elites. Herman and Chomsky therefore conclude that the central crisis of modern democracy lies not merely in misinformation but in the institutional organization of communication itself. A genuinely democratic society would require not only formal freedom of speech but a transformation of the structures governing visibility,

legitimacy, and public discourse so that citizens could finally encounter reality beyond the carefully managed limits imposed by concentrated wealth and political authority.

Herman, E.S. and Chomsky, N. (1988) Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media. New York: Pantheon Books.

The Machinery of Consensus / The Market Cathedral of Obedience

Edward S. Herman in "The Propaganda Model Revisited," published in *Monthly Review* in July 1996, returns to the theoretical framework first developed with Noam Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* and argues that the model has not weakened with time but has instead become even more relevant under the conditions of intensified corporate globalization, media concentration, and ideological conformity. Herman explains that the propaganda model emerged from the observation that mainstream American media repeatedly operate within remarkably narrow assumptions despite the appearance of pluralism and open debate. Journalists and editors rely overwhelmingly upon elite information sources, accept official definitions of political reality with minimal skepticism, and participate in recurring propaganda campaigns aligned closely with the interests of dominant political and economic institutions. Rather than interpreting these patterns as accidental or merely the result of individual journalistic failure, Herman and Chomsky sought structural explanations rooted in the institutional organization of the media themselves. The propaganda model therefore rejects conventional liberal theories claiming that journalism functions primarily through professional ethics, consumer responsiveness, or the balancing effects of market competition. According to mainstream ideology, the existence of multiple media organizations competing for audiences should naturally generate diversity, objectivity, and democratic accountability. Herman argues that such assumptions ignore the decisive influence of ownership structures, advertising dependence, institutional sourcing, organized flak, and dominant ideological systems that together shape the limits of acceptable discourse before news even reaches the public sphere.

Herman emphasizes that the propaganda model differs fundamentally from mainstream analyses because it recognizes the media as deeply embedded within systems of concentrated wealth and corporate power. Large media organizations are profit-driven corporations owned by wealthy elites or massive conglomerates whose economic survival depends heavily upon advertising revenue. Advertisers themselves are corporations seeking commercial environments favorable to consumption, investment, and market stability. Media institutions also depend continuously upon governments, major businesses, think tanks, and elite experts for the steady supply of information necessary to sustain daily production schedules. These relationships create overlapping interests among political authority, corporate power, and mass communication systems. The media are therefore not external observers critically monitoring centers of power but integral components of the same institutional order. Herman stresses that the propaganda model does not depend upon conspiracy in the simplistic sense of secret centralized commands. The filtering process functions largely through decentralized adaptation, where numerous individuals and institutions sharing similar assumptions independently reproduce compatible narratives because their structural interests coincide. Government agencies, corporate actors, media executives, advertisers, and elite commentators often arrive at similar conclusions not through hidden coordination but through participation in the same ideological and economic environment. Propaganda becomes systemic rather than merely conspiratorial.

The five filters identified in the original model—ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak, and anticommunist ideology—continue to determine which stories become visible and how they are framed. Herman revisits the example of Poland and Turkey during the early 1980s to illustrate how these filters produce systematic dichotomization between “worthy” and “unworthy” victims. The suppression of the Solidarity movement in communist Poland received massive media attention because the event aligned with the geopolitical objectives of the Reagan administration and broader Western anticommunist ideology. Official sources in Washington enthusiastically promoted stories highlighting Polish repression because they reinforced hostility toward Soviet influence and strengthened support for American foreign policy. By contrast, the brutal repression of trade unions and dissidents in Turkey received comparatively little attention despite severe human-rights abuses because Turkey remained a loyal ally of the United States, strongly anticommunist, supportive of foreign investment, and hostile toward organized labor. Journalists investigating Turkish state violence would have faced institutional obstacles, greater sourcing costs, and likely retaliation from government officials, business interests, and ideological organizations producing flak against narratives damaging to allied regimes. Herman demonstrates that the distinction between worthy and unworthy victims emerges naturally from the operation of the filters themselves. It is as though the media silently follow an unwritten rule: condemn the crimes of enemies intensely while minimizing or ignoring the crimes of friends.

This process of selective visibility forms the foundation for sustained propaganda campaigns whenever dominant institutions perceive strategic advantages in amplifying particular narratives. Herman revisits the Soviet destruction of Korean Airlines Flight 007 in 1983 as a classic example. The incident generated enormous emotional outrage throughout Western media because it served the interests of the Reagan administration by intensifying anti-Soviet hostility and strengthening support for military expansion. Newspapers and broadcasters transformed the tragedy into a prolonged moral spectacle portraying the Soviet Union as uniquely barbaric and irrational. Herman contrasts this reaction with the much weaker response to Israel’s destruction of a Libyan civilian airliner in 1973. Although civilians died under similarly tragic circumstances, the event failed to provoke equivalent outrage because Israel occupied the position of a strategic ally within American geopolitical frameworks. The selective intensity of coverage revealed that propaganda campaigns are initiated not according to universal ethical principles but according to calculations concerning political usefulness. Certain atrocities become globally symbolic while others disappear rapidly into silence because elite interests determine which narratives deserve emotional amplification. Herman also addresses criticisms directed against the propaganda model by liberal intellectuals and sections of the academic left. Many critics resist the model because it challenges their belief that the media, despite imperfections, fundamentally function as a democratic institution responsive to public needs and professional ethics. Some postmodern theorists reject structural analysis altogether, preferring fragmented examinations of local struggles and isolated acts of resistance rather than comprehensive critiques of institutional power. Herman argues that many such critiques rely upon superficial dismissals, labeling the propaganda model “conspiratorial,” “mechanical,” or “overly deterministic” without seriously confronting the extensive empirical evidence supporting it. Critics such as Dan Hallin emphasize the maturation of journalistic professionalism and claim that professional norms protect the public sphere from direct owner control. Herman responds by arguing that professionalism itself often functions as an ideological mechanism legitimizing media authority while masking deeper structural dependencies. Professional journalism did not emerge as a rebellion against corporate ownership but as a strategy encouraged by media institutions themselves to enhance credibility and public trust. The language of objectivity and neutrality frequently conceals the extent to which journalists internalize

dominant assumptions and rely heavily upon official sources. Even critics sympathetic to professionalism admit that modern journalism allows governments and elite institutions enormous influence over news agendas simply through their control of information flows.

Herman further argues that criticisms accusing the propaganda model of determinism misunderstand the purpose of theoretical models themselves. Any model simplifies reality to identify recurring structural patterns. The relevant question is not whether exceptions exist but whether the model successfully predicts and explains dominant tendencies within media behavior. According to Herman, the propaganda model has repeatedly demonstrated extraordinary explanatory power across numerous case studies involving war coverage, labor disputes, trade agreements, economic policy, and foreign intervention. The model does not deny the existence of contestation, resistance, or occasional dissent within the media. Rather, it explains why such dissent remains structurally limited and why fundamental challenges to concentrated political and economic power rarely achieve sustained legitimacy within mainstream discourse. One of Herman's most important arguments concerns the enhanced relevance of the propaganda model during the decade following the publication of *Manufacturing Consent*. Far from weakening, the structural filters intensified dramatically due to corporate globalization, media mergers, privatization, and technological transformation. Ownership concentration increased as massive conglomerates absorbed newspapers, television networks, film studios, publishing houses, and communication infrastructures into vertically integrated corporate empires. Competition for advertising revenue became fiercer, leading to shrinking newsrooms, cost-cutting measures, and declining institutional support for investigative journalism. Journalists faced increasing pressure to produce larger quantities of content with fewer resources, deepening their dependence upon government and corporate public-relations material. Herman notes that studies revealed an expanding proportion of news content originating directly from the public-relations industry itself. The boundaries between journalism, corporate communication, and state propaganda became increasingly blurred.

Herman also rejects optimistic assumptions that the Internet and new communication technologies would automatically democratize media systems. Although digital platforms create possibilities for alternative communication, they also intensify corporate concentration by enabling media firms to reduce staffing costs while expanding global distribution networks. Technological innovation alone does not guarantee democratic outcomes because market forces continue to shape ownership, visibility, and access. Without structural transformation, new technologies may strengthen rather than weaken corporate domination of communication systems. Herman therefore insists that the propaganda model remains essential precisely because contemporary developments have amplified the structural forces originally identified in *Manufacturing Consent*. The collapse of the Soviet Union weakened the specific ideological filter of anticommunism, yet Herman argues that it was quickly replaced by a near-religious faith in the inherent virtue of market capitalism itself. The "miracle of the market" became a dominant ideological assumption shaping media discourse during the post-Cold War era. Economic globalization, deregulation, privatization, and free-trade agreements were presented as natural and inevitable despite widespread public opposition. Herman discusses the North American Free Trade Agreement as a revealing example. Polls consistently showed that many ordinary citizens opposed NAFTA and later resisted government bailouts protecting investors during the Mexican financial crisis. Nevertheless, media coverage overwhelmingly favored pro-NAFTA perspectives because transnational corporations and financial institutions directly benefited from global trade liberalization. The selection of experts, framing of debates, and editorial commentary reflected elite economic priorities rather

than popular democratic concerns. Similar patterns appeared in labor reporting, healthcare debates, and coverage of anti-drug policies, where media narratives consistently aligned with corporate and state interests.

In his concluding reflections Herman emphasizes that the propaganda model was designed primarily as a tool for analyzing media behavior rather than measuring media effects directly. The existence of audience skepticism or isolated resistance does not invalidate the model because populations may reject official narratives even while the media themselves continue functioning within structurally constrained frameworks. The essential issue remains the organization of communication systems and the institutional pressures shaping what becomes visible, credible, and politically legitimate. Herman argues that critics have failed to provide any alternative framework capable of explaining media performance with comparable consistency or empirical depth. Indeed, the model often underestimated rather than exaggerated the degree of media subservience to governmental and corporate propaganda. The continued concentration of wealth, erosion of investigative journalism, expansion of public relations, and intensification of ideological conformity all confirm the enduring relevance of the propaganda model as a critical instrument for understanding how modern media manufacture consent while preserving the appearance of democratic freedom.

Herman, E. (1996) 'The Propaganda Model Revisited', Monthly Review, July 1996.

The Marketed Republic / The Encoding of Manufactured Reality

Brian Michael Goss in *Rebooting the Herman & Chomsky Propaganda Model in the Twenty-First Century* revisits and expands the propaganda model developed by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, arguing that the structural logic identified in *Manufacturing Consent* has not disappeared in the digital age but has instead adapted itself to new technological, political, and economic conditions. Goss begins by emphasizing that news media differ fundamentally from ordinary commodities because media texts can be consumed simultaneously by millions without diminishing in quality or availability. Unlike material goods such as furniture or food, media narratives possess an almost limitless capacity for symbolic reproduction. This characteristic grants journalism immense cultural power because shared media narratives function as informal educational systems teaching populations how to interpret political reality, national identity, morality, citizenship, and social belonging. In democratic societies journalism is ideally imagined as a civic institution enabling informed participation in public life. Citizens are expected to rely upon news media in order to understand political events, evaluate governments, and engage responsibly in democratic decision-making. Yet Goss argues that the enormous influence of media institutions makes the question of accountability profoundly important because the symbolic frameworks distributed through journalism shape not merely opinions but the entire horizon through which societies understand themselves. The media become collective instructors of reality itself.

Goss illustrates the extraordinary authority of television news through the dramatic example of the disputed American presidential election of 2000. On the night when Vice President Al Gore prepared to concede defeat, he reportedly halted his speech because television networks had already projected the election outcome in favor of George W. Bush before recounts or legal challenges had concluded. The symbolic authority of televised news became so overwhelming that even one of the central political actors accepted reality through the lens of media representation. Millions of viewers simultaneously experienced the same mediated interpretation, demonstrating

how journalism functions not merely as a recorder of events but as an institution capable of defining political reality in real time. Goss uses this moment to illustrate the central insight of the propaganda model: the media possess immense social authority while simultaneously operating according to structural logics often incompatible with democratic ideals. Herman and Chomsky argued that mainstream news in the United States functions simultaneously as a commodity and as a cultural text. Although journalism claims to serve the public interest, its institutional organization within capitalist markets means that commercial imperatives frequently override democratic responsibilities. James Curran's observations reinforce this contradiction. American political culture treats the press almost as a civic religion grounded in the belief that media institutions remain independent from government interference because they operate within markets rather than under direct state ownership. Journalists are celebrated as professionals committed to neutrality, factual accuracy, and public service. Compared with openly authoritarian systems where governments directly impose ideological control, the American media appear exceptionally free and pluralistic. Yet Goss argues that this image collapses under closer scrutiny. Even within formally democratic societies the media remain deeply entangled with state and corporate interests. Curran therefore describes the American media system as only "semi-independent" from political authority despite its constant ritualistic performances of press freedom and neutrality. The mythology of independence conceals a deeper structural dependency in which journalism remains embedded within networks of economic and ideological power. Goss emphasizes that the propaganda model does not focus primarily upon audience manipulation in the simplistic sense of direct psychological control. Instead, it examines how news narratives themselves are encoded structurally through institutional pressures shaping visibility, framing, sourcing, and legitimacy before audiences even encounter them.

The consequences of this system become visible in widespread public confusion and misinformation. Goss cites studies revealing that large portions of the American population remain profoundly uninformed about major political events despite constant exposure to media coverage. Surveys concerning the Bush administration's response to the Tiananmen Square massacre demonstrated that nearly half of respondents believed sanctions had been imposed against China when in fact they had not. Similar confusion surrounded Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction prior to the 2003 invasion. Significant portions of the public either incorrectly believed Iraq possessed such weapons or admitted uncertainty despite years of intensive media discussion. International comparisons further reveal that Americans frequently possess lower levels of political knowledge than citizens in several European democracies. These findings expose a paradox at the heart of contemporary media culture: societies saturated with information may still produce populations unable to distinguish reality from propaganda effectively. Goss suggests that this ignorance is not accidental but structurally connected to the commercial organization of journalism itself. Democracies require informed citizens capable of rational self-government, yet media systems organized primarily around profit and elite interests fail consistently to fulfill this democratic function. The propaganda model developed by Herman and Chomsky therefore remains essential because it explains how institutional filters shape news production systematically. Goss revisits the five filters in detail. The first filter concerns ownership and the profit orientation of mass media. Although numerous media companies exist formally, the dominant narratives shaping public consciousness originate overwhelmingly from a small number of massive conglomerates possessing immense financial and technological reach. Deregulation, privatization, and business-oriented management practices have accelerated concentration within communication industries, allowing corporations to dominate multiple sectors simultaneously including television, publishing, film production, telecommunications, and digital distribution.

Industrial giants such as General Electric became major media proprietors, integrating journalism more deeply into broader systems of corporate power. Through repetition and market dominance these conglomerates establish resilient narratives defining acceptable political reality across entire societies.

The second filter concerns advertising, which functions as an unofficial license determining economic survival within media markets. Goss emphasizes that advertising revenue vastly exceeds income generated directly through audience purchases. Consequently, media organizations orient themselves primarily toward attracting consumers valuable to advertisers rather than serving democratic publics seeking truthful information. Because advertisers prefer affluent audiences possessing significant purchasing power, journalism acquires an inherent class bias. Radical publications, labor-oriented media, or outlets addressing poorer demographics struggle economically because they fail to attract lucrative advertising support. Commercial imperatives therefore shape editorial decisions continuously, rewarding narratives compatible with consumer capitalism while marginalizing perspectives threatening corporate interests. The audience itself becomes a commodity sold to advertisers, transforming journalism into an extension of market logic rather than an autonomous civic institution. The third filter, sourcing, reveals how media organizations develop symbiotic relationships with bureaucratic institutions capable of providing steady streams of inexpensive information. Governments, corporations, military agencies, police departments, think tanks, and elite experts become privileged sources because journalists operating under economic pressure and strict deadlines require constant access to authoritative material. This “bureaucratic affinity” ensures that official perspectives dominate public discourse while alternative voices lacking institutional support remain marginalized. Think tanks intensify this process by supplying pre-approved experts whose opinions align with elite assumptions while appearing intellectually independent. Journalism therefore reproduces dominant ideological frameworks not necessarily through conscious conspiracy but through structural dependency upon institutions already possessing political and economic authority.

The fourth filter, flak, refers to the punitive responses directed against media organizations deviating from accepted narratives. Lawsuits, public attacks, advertiser pressure, regulatory threats, orchestrated complaints, and ideological monitoring groups all function as mechanisms disciplining journalists into conformity. Flak creates an atmosphere where challenging dominant interests becomes professionally dangerous and financially risky. The media learn to avoid topics likely to provoke retaliation from powerful actors. Self-censorship emerges naturally because institutional survival depends upon maintaining favorable relationships with governments, corporations, advertisers, and influential political organizations. The fifth filter originally focused upon anticommunism as the dominant ideological framework organizing political fear during the Cold War. Goss argues that although the Soviet collapse weakened traditional anticommunist rhetoric, the underlying mechanism of dichotomization remains central to contemporary media systems. The world continues to be divided symbolically into “Us” and “Them,” though the designated enemies shift according to historical circumstances. New threats replace old ones while preserving the same emotional structure of fear, moral polarization, and ideological obedience. The propaganda model therefore retains relevance because its deeper concern lies not with any single ideology but with the structural process through which media construct enemies, legitimize authority, and organize political perception.

Goss further argues that developments occurring after the publication of *Manufacturing Consent* have largely strengthened rather than weakened the propaganda model. Media ownership has become increasingly concentrated while competition for advertising revenue has intensified.

Newsrooms face shrinking budgets, declining investigative resources, and growing dependence upon public-relations material generated by governments and corporations. Journalists possess less professional autonomy because economic pressures demand faster production with fewer institutional resources. Critics claiming that the Internet would democratize communication overlook the extent to which digital technologies also facilitate global corporate expansion and labor reduction within media industries. Although alternative voices can emerge online, market forces continue to shape visibility, distribution, and economic sustainability. New technologies therefore do not automatically produce democratic communication because the underlying structures of ownership and commercial dependency remain intact. The propaganda model also explains contemporary coverage of issues such as NAFTA, labor disputes, healthcare reform, and the so-called “drug wars.” Goss notes that media narratives consistently aligned with elite preferences even when public opinion diverged sharply. Coverage of trade agreements favored corporate globalization because major media institutions themselves benefited directly from transnational market expansion. Labor struggles received minimal attention or were framed negatively because organized labor threatened corporate priorities. Healthcare debates and anti-drug campaigns similarly reflected the assumptions of powerful economic sectors rather than democratic public needs. These examples demonstrate that the propaganda model remains highly effective in explaining why mainstream journalism repeatedly privileges elite consensus over broad public interest.

Goss concludes that although critics continue labeling the propaganda model conspiratorial or deterministic, no alternative framework has matched its explanatory power regarding the structural behavior of mainstream media. The model does not claim that every journalist consciously serves propaganda goals or that dissent never appears. Rather, it reveals the institutional pressures shaping news production systematically across large communication systems. The central insight remains profoundly unsettling for liberal democratic ideology: media organizations claiming independence and neutrality often function structurally to manufacture consent for political and economic arrangements benefiting concentrated power. Journalism therefore becomes less a guardian of democratic participation than a mechanism through which dominant institutions encode reality itself, teaching populations how to interpret the world while narrowing the boundaries of imaginable political alternatives.

Goss, B.M. (2013) Rebooting the Herman & Chomsky Propaganda Model in the Twenty-First Century. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

The Empire of Ownership / The Market Rituals of Manufactured Speech

Brian Michael Goss in *Rebooting the Herman & Chomsky Propaganda Model in the Twenty-First Century* examines the transformation of media ownership and political influence in the neoliberal age, arguing that despite technological innovation and the apparent diversification of communication platforms, concentrated ownership remains one of the most decisive forces shaping public discourse. Goss opens with the striking image of a gathering hosted in July 2011 at the vast Cotswolds estate of Elisabeth Murdoch and her husband Matthew Freud, where politicians, media executives, ministers, strategists, and cultural elites mingled together within the intimate social networks connecting political authority and corporate media power. The guest list itself symbolized the collapse of any meaningful boundary between journalism, governance, public relations, and economic influence. Cabinet ministers, Labour politicians, BBC executives, advisors to the Prime Minister, and powerful figures within News Corporation all occupied the

same social environment, sharing relationships that transcended official ideological divisions. The image of James Murdoch in animated discussion with Rebekah Brooks shortly before the eruption of the News International phone-hacking scandal became emblematic of a broader reality: modern media power no longer operates simply through isolated acts of editorial control but through deeply embedded networks of social intimacy between elites responsible for shaping political and communicative reality itself. The media do not stand outside systems of power observing them critically; rather, they exist within overlapping circles of influence where political and economic authority merge into a unified culture of governance.

Goss revisits Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* as an early cinematic meditation on the dangers of concentrated media ownership. The film's fictional media baron, inspired partly by William Randolph Hearst, attempts to impose his personal vision upon reality through his vast communication empire. Yet Goss argues that the real historical trajectory of Rupert Murdoch reveals a far more complex and unsettling form of media domination than even Welles imagined. Over decades Murdoch transformed News Corporation from a relatively modest Australian enterprise into one of the most influential transnational media conglomerates in modern history. Scholars frequently described News Corporation as perhaps the first genuinely global media empire because of the extraordinary breadth of its holdings across newspapers, television, film, publishing, and digital communication. Murdoch's influence extended beyond business success into the direct shaping of political life itself. Lance Price, media advisor to Tony Blair, famously remarked that Murdoch's views carried a weight within British governance equivalent to that of a cabinet minister. Political leaders understood instinctively that major decisions could not ignore the anticipated reactions of Murdoch's media empire. The symbolic meaning of democracy therefore became increasingly unstable in societies where unelected media proprietors possessed the power to shape electoral narratives, public legitimacy, and political careers. Murdoch's influence became particularly visible during moments of geopolitical crisis and electoral uncertainty. Goss notes that all 247 Murdoch-owned newspapers supported the 2003 invasion of Iraq despite widespread global opposition to the war. Such unanimity exposed the degree to which concentrated ownership could impose coherent ideological direction across diverse national markets. Similarly, Fox News played a pivotal role during the disputed 2000 American presidential election when the network prematurely declared George W. Bush victorious in Florida before the outcome had been resolved officially. Because Fox News moved first, other networks followed rapidly, helping construct a public narrative of Bush's victory even while recounts and legal battles continued. The event demonstrated that media institutions do not merely report political outcomes but actively participate in producing political legitimacy itself. Through repetition and symbolic authority, concentrated media systems can shape collective perception faster than democratic institutions can verify factual reality.

The exposure of News Corporation's phone-hacking scandal in 2011 intensified public awareness concerning the dangers of concentrated media power. The scandal led to numerous arrests, legal settlements, and the closure of the *News of the World*, one of Britain's most successful tabloids. Yet Goss argues that the scandal represented more than individual criminality or ethical failure. It revealed the deeper sense of entitlement accompanying prolonged institutional dominance. When media corporations acquire extraordinary influence over politics, culture, and public perception, they begin to operate according to assumptions of near-immunity from accountability. Journalism itself risks transformation into a mechanism of surveillance and manipulation serving elite interests rather than democratic transparency. The scandal therefore symbolized the moral consequences of communication systems governed primarily through concentrated power rather than civic

responsibility. Goss situates these developments within a longer historical tradition of criticism concerning media concentration. Decades earlier Ben Bagdikian's influential work *Media Monopoly* warned that despite the apparent diversity of thousands of American media firms, a relatively tiny number of corporations controlled the majority of industry revenues and therefore shaped the dominant narratives circulating within society. Deregulation accelerated this concentration dramatically during the Reagan and Bush years, reducing the number of powerful firms controlling communication industries even further. Bagdikian connected media concentration to Eisenhower's warning concerning the "military-industrial complex," emphasizing that giant conglomerates integrating defense industries, technology, finance, and communication possessed the ability not merely to entertain audiences but to shape public consciousness in ways favorable to their interconnected economic interests. General Electric's ownership of NBC became a striking example because the same corporation profited simultaneously from military production and news coverage concerning war, national security, and government policy. The media therefore became structurally intertwined with the very systems of power they were supposedly monitoring independently.

Goss asks whether the transformations associated with globalization and digital technology have fundamentally weakened the concerns raised by Herman and Chomsky regarding concentrated ownership. Although some commentators claim that the Internet and new media platforms have decentralized communication, Goss argues that ownership structures continue to shape journalism profoundly. What has changed is not the disappearance of concentration but its adaptation to neoliberal economic conditions emphasizing deregulation, privatization, institutional investment, and relentless short-term profitability. The rise of institutional investors and financial management has shifted media ownership away from the older image of the eccentric mogul toward more impersonal forms of corporate governance. Yet this transformation does not necessarily produce greater democratic accountability. On the contrary, media corporations increasingly resemble financial instruments evaluated according to market performance rather than public responsibility. The pressure for constant profitability encourages cost-cutting, newsroom reductions, homogenized content, and dependence upon commercially safe narratives attractive to advertisers and investors. The broader ideological context shaping these transformations is neoliberalism itself. Since the 1970s neoliberal economic philosophy has increasingly dominated political and cultural life through policies emphasizing deregulation, privatization, free markets, weakened labor protections, and reductions in public investment. Goss notes Margaret Thatcher's famous statement that economics was merely the method while the real objective was "to change the soul." Neoliberalism therefore operates not only as an economic doctrine but as a cultural project reshaping human identity around individualism, commodification, and market logic. Media institutions played a central role in normalizing this ideological transformation. Think tanks, public-relations networks, and business-oriented intellectuals carefully crafted narratives portraying deregulation and privatization as natural, inevitable, and morally desirable despite rising inequality and financial instability. Although neoliberal policies contributed to inflation control and technological innovation, they also intensified wealth concentration, weakened labor unions, expanded economic insecurity, and generated recurring financial crises requiring government bailouts for "too big to fail" institutions. The contradiction became increasingly visible: governments claimed to retreat from economic intervention while simultaneously protecting enormous corporate systems whenever markets collapsed.

Within this neoliberal environment media conglomeration accelerated because communication industries themselves faced uncertain audience demand and volatile profitability. Goss explains

that large corporations pursue mergers and acquisitions in order to spread financial risk across multiple sectors. Successes in one area can subsidize failures elsewhere, making concentration economically attractive within unstable cultural markets. Companies such as Bertelsmann engaged in hundreds of acquisitions during the 1990s and early 2000s, creating intricate systems of alliance capitalism where giant conglomerates and smaller dependent firms coexist within highly interconnected commercial networks. Media industries therefore became increasingly integrated into global financial capitalism itself. The deregulation of American media during the 1990s intensified these tendencies dramatically. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 removed many ownership restrictions and enabled unprecedented consolidation across radio, television, and telecommunications sectors. Clear Channel's acquisition of more than 1,200 radio stations became one of the clearest examples of this transformation. Local diversity declined as homogenized programming replaced regionally distinct journalism and community-based reporting. Although some efforts to impose further deregulation later encountered public resistance, the general trajectory favored increasingly concentrated corporate ownership over democratic accountability. Goss emphasizes that defenders of neoliberal media policy frequently argue that large corporations can produce higher-quality content through economies of scale. Yet empirical studies often demonstrate the opposite. Smaller locally focused media organizations frequently provide more substantive journalism and stronger community engagement than giant conglomerates driven primarily by commercial efficiency.

Debates over market concentration also reveal the limitations of purely quantitative analysis. Some neoliberal theorists argue that the American media system remains highly competitive because concentration measurements across the entire information sector appear relatively moderate. Goss discusses disputes surrounding the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index, which economists use to calculate market concentration. While aggregate national figures may suggest only moderate concentration, local media markets often function as near-monopolies with extremely high concentration levels. More importantly, purely numerical calculations fail to address the democratic implications of ownership itself. Baker and other critics argue that the essential question is not simply how many companies exist but whether communication systems support a genuinely plural public sphere containing diverse independent voices capable of challenging concentrated power. The disappearance of even a single oppositional outlet may significantly weaken democratic discourse regardless of overall market statistics. Goss concludes by reflecting upon the "twilight of the moguls" and the rise of institutional ownership. Although figures such as Rupert Murdoch and Silvio Berlusconi still symbolize the older era of highly personalized media power, contemporary communication systems are increasingly dominated by institutional investors, private equity firms, and professional management structures emphasizing short-term financial returns. Media corporations become less expressions of individual ideological ambition and more components of broader systems of financial capitalism. Yet the democratic dangers remain fundamentally unchanged. Whether concentrated communication power is exercised by charismatic moguls or impersonal conglomerates, the result is a public sphere vulnerable to manipulation, homogenization, and elite control. Journalism increasingly operates according to the imperatives of profitability rather than civic responsibility, reducing the diversity of perspectives necessary for democratic self-government. The propaganda model therefore retains extraordinary relevance because it reveals how concentrated ownership structures shape not merely economic outcomes but the symbolic conditions under which societies understand politics, morality, and reality itself. In the neoliberal age the ownership of communication becomes inseparable from the ownership of public consciousness.

Goss, B.M. (2013) *Rebooting the Herman & Chomsky Propaganda Model in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

The Advertised Republic / Journalism Inside the Neoliberal Cage

Brian Michael Goss in *Rebooting the Herman & Chomsky Propaganda Model in the Twenty-First Century* examines the crisis of journalism inside a neoliberal media environment where the survival of news institutions increasingly depends upon commercial logic rather than democratic obligation. He begins from the central dilemma captured by Harold Evans's warning that the challenge for newspapers is not merely to remain in business but to remain in journalism. This distinction is crucial because a news organization may survive economically while losing the civic function that gives journalism its democratic meaning. Goss situates this problem within the broader relationship between media, political power, and public knowledge. In moments of revolution against abusive regimes, control over broadcasting often becomes one of the symbolic acts through which political authority is challenged, as when Libyan rebels switched off the official Jamahiriya station during the revolt against Muammar Gaddafi. Such moments reveal how visibly authoritarian governments understand the importance of controlling images, narratives, and access to information. Yet Goss argues that the deeper danger in liberal capitalist societies may not come primarily from overt state censorship but from the quieter domination of journalism by private commercial power. The democratic myth often imagines censorship as something imposed from above by governments, but the neoliberal media order demonstrates that market structures can discipline journalism with equal or greater force. When advertising, ownership pressure, cost-cutting, and audience demographics determine what news is worth producing, the press may remain formally free while becoming substantively incapable of fulfilling its democratic mission. The newsroom becomes less a civic institution than a commercial unit governed by efficiency, market segmentation, and revenue protection. In this context, the Herman and Chomsky propaganda model remains vital because it explains how journalism can be distorted without direct censorship. Its second filter, advertising, shows how commercial dependency reshapes news selection, weakens investigative autonomy, and encourages media organizations to serve affluent consumers and corporate sponsors before ordinary citizens. The result is a paradoxical system in which the public is surrounded by news yet deprived of the depth, diversity, and seriousness required for democratic self-government.

Goss describes the contemporary American press as engulfed in a commercial upheaval that has hollowed out the very institutions once associated with serious reporting. Major newspapers reduced their workforces dramatically, foreign bureaus disappeared, statehouse reporting declined, and Washington coverage was cut by newspaper chains that once maintained stronger political presence. The Los Angeles Times reduced its staff by half before the Tribune Company entered bankruptcy, while newspapers such as the Baltimore Sun, Boston Globe, and Philadelphia Inquirer closed foreign bureaus at precisely the historical moment when globalization made international knowledge more necessary. This contradiction exposes the central irrationality of the neoliberal news system: as the world becomes more interconnected, the institutions responsible for explaining that interconnection reduce their capacity to observe it. Goss draws on broader critiques of the English-speaking press to show how declining job security, the replacement of experienced reporters with cheaper junior staff, shrinking editorial resources, efficiency drives, increased dependence on external information subsidies, and the influence of accountants have all weakened journalism's independent capacity. Newsrooms are expected to produce more content with fewer people, fewer resources, and less time for verification. Under these conditions, journalism becomes

more vulnerable to public relations material, official sources, corporate messaging, and simplified narratives that can be produced quickly and cheaply. The old newspaper model may appear to be collapsing, but Goss shows that the collapse is not merely technological. It is also ideological and managerial. Executives treated news as material placed beside advertisements rather than as a democratic necessity, preferring mediocre but profitable content to costly, serious reporting. As readers migrated online, advertising revenue fell sharply because digital audiences generated far less income than print readers, even when online readership was enormous. The crisis therefore contains a strange contradiction. Newspapers may reach more people than ever through digital platforms, yet the revenue structure sustaining serious journalism has weakened. Hard copies may represent only a small fraction of total readership, but they continue to generate much of the income. Online visibility has expanded while the economic basis of reporting has deteriorated. This produces a public sphere filled with circulation, clicks, and fragments of information but increasingly deprived of the labor-intensive journalism necessary to hold power accountable.

The class dimension of this system is central to Goss's analysis. American news media live a double life: they present themselves as nourishment for an enlightened democratic public, yet they operate as commodities bought and sold within markets structured by advertising. Traditionally, newspapers relied upon both readers and advertisers, but the balance between these sources has been deeply unequal. Advertising provides the dominant share of revenue, and in broadcast media this dependency becomes even stronger. This means that media outlets are not primarily incentivized to reach the largest or most socially representative audience. Instead, they are incentivized to reach the audience most valuable to advertisers. The poor, the elderly, the working class, and politically marginalized communities become less attractive because they possess less disposable income and therefore less commercial value. The result is an informational order organized around class privilege. News appealing to affluent audiences receives greater attention: investment advice, elite neighborhoods, lifestyle consumption, luxury travel, business confidence, and cultural signals of status. Meanwhile, poverty, labor struggle, elder vulnerability, and structural inequality receive minimal coverage. Goss notes studies showing that only tiny fractions of news reports concern the poor or the elderly, while celebrity coverage receives vastly greater attention. This imbalance is not accidental but structurally produced by the commercial logic of audience valuation. Editors were trained to pursue wealthy demographics, and some publications even attempted to shed less desirable readers in order to preserve an upscale profile. The fate of the *Daily Herald* in Britain shows that even large circulation could not save a working-class newspaper if advertisers judged its readers insufficiently profitable. In this sense, advertising becomes a hidden class censor. It does not need to ban stories directly. It simply rewards media that address affluent audiences and punishes those that serve readers without strong purchasing power. The public sphere becomes stratified, with well-to-do elites receiving news that briefs them on issues relevant to their interests while poorer citizens become objects of neglect, stereotype, or silence. Journalism under such conditions does not simply fail to represent society; it reproduces the hierarchies of society by making the concerns of wealth appear more newsworthy than the suffering of deprivation.

Goss then turns to the content consequences of commercial rule, showing how advertisers and owners can shape not only the economic structure of journalism but the emotional atmosphere of news itself. Advertisers often prefer environments that do not disturb consumption, challenge corporate legitimacy, or create moods incompatible with commercial messaging. During the Gulf War, for example, networks adjusted segments so that patriotic or uplifting material could precede commercial breaks, protecting the emotional tone required by advertisers. Such examples reveal

that the advertising filter operates not only through the exclusion of certain stories but also through the scripting of affect. News must be serious enough to attract attention but not so disruptive that it threatens the marketplace atmosphere surrounding it. Studies cited by Goss show that journalists themselves recognize breaches of newsroom independence by advertisers and owners. Conglomerate ownership deepens the problem because media divisions may avoid criticizing other divisions of the same corporation. Agreements not to disparage parent companies or subsidiaries demonstrate how commercial loyalty can be formalized within professional culture. Neoliberal defenders claim that profit guarantees independence because market competition supposedly frees journalism from government control. Goss challenges this claim by showing that profit can produce its own censorship. News Corporation's sensitivity to Chinese markets, including spiked stories and interference with publishing decisions, illustrates how commercial expansion can silence politically inconvenient reporting. The firing of Phil Donahue from MSNBC in 2003, despite strong ratings, further demonstrates that commercial media may reject popular content when it threatens ideological comfort or advertiser confidence during moments of war. Management memos at ideologically driven networks show that story angles may be guided from above in ways that protect political narratives favorable to ruling interests. Thus, the neoliberal dream of a transparent private press collapses into a more troubling reality. Private ownership does not eliminate propaganda; it privatizes and commercializes it. It replaces the censor's command with the executive's calculation, the advertiser's preference, and the market's invisible discipline.

The Internet appears at first to offer an escape from this commercial cage, yet Goss treats such optimism cautiously. Digital media may expand access, lower barriers to publication, and permit alternative voices to circulate, but the economic structure of online news often reinforces incumbent power. Print readers generate far more revenue than online readers, and online advertising remains a small fraction of traditional newspaper income even when web traffic is massive. Many of the most visited online news platforms are extensions of established media institutions rather than genuinely independent alternatives. Aggregators often reproduce the judgments and priorities of dominant outlets, amplifying rather than overturning existing hierarchies of visibility. In this sense, the Internet may multiply distribution without democratizing the underlying production of news. It can create the appearance of abundance while leaving original reporting concentrated within the same weakened and commercialized institutions. Goss therefore refuses the comforting idea that technology alone can solve the crisis of journalism. Without changes in ownership, funding, newsroom capacity, and public purpose, digital platforms may merely accelerate the same neoliberal pressures: fewer reporters, more content, faster circulation, weaker verification, and deeper dependence upon advertising metrics. The cybersavior myth mistakes access for democracy and speed for knowledge. A democratic media system requires not only channels for expression but institutions capable of sustained investigation, public accountability, and independence from both state coercion and private domination.

Goss closes by considering non-commercial configurations that might partially resist the neoliberal degradation of journalism. Trust-owned media such as The Guardian, non-profit arrangements such as the Poynter Institute's ownership of the St. Petersburg Times, public service broadcasting such as the BBC, and proposals for mixed ownership systems all suggest alternatives to the purely commercial model. These institutions are not perfect, nor does Goss imply that state-funded media should simply replace private media. Rather, the crucial point is that democratic communication requires diverse funding and ownership structures capable of reducing dependence upon advertisers and short-term profitability. A plural system containing private, public, non-profit, journalist-owned, and community-based institutions would be better positioned to sustain

critical attention to public issues than a system dominated by commercial imperatives alone. The deeper philosophical issue is whether journalism should be treated merely as another commodity or as a public good essential to democratic life. If news is organized primarily around market value, then the public receives information according to advertiser preference, class hierarchy, and corporate strategy. If news is understood as a democratic necessity, then its institutions must be protected from the pressures that turn public knowledge into a by-product of profit. Goss's analysis therefore extends the Herman and Chomsky propaganda model into the neoliberal present by showing that the crisis of journalism is not simply a crisis of technology, readership, or business adaptation. It is a crisis of democratic meaning. A press may survive as an industry while failing as journalism. It may circulate endlessly while informing poorly. It may claim independence while obeying the commercial structures that define what can be seen, said, investigated, and remembered. The neoliberal milieu therefore reveals the central danger of contemporary media: not the disappearance of news, but the survival of news in a form emptied of its democratic substance.

Goss, B.M. (2013) Rebooting the Herman & Chomsky Propaganda Model in the Twenty-First Century. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

The Scripted Republic / The Ritual Machinery of Obedient News

Brian Michael Goss in *Rebooting the Herman & Chomsky Propaganda Model in the Twenty-First Century* explores how journalism in liberal democracies often functions less as an adversarial watchdog than as a disciplined system of narrative management shaped by patriotism, institutional dependency, and routinized obedience to power. He opens with Dan Rather's emotional declaration following the national trauma of September 11, where the veteran journalist insisted that he wished to fulfill his role not only as a reporter but as a patriotic American willing to give the government and military the "benefit of the doubt." The statement is revealing precisely because Rather did not reject journalism openly. He still affirmed his responsibility to ask difficult questions when necessary. Yet his words expose the deeper psychological and cultural pressures surrounding journalism during moments of national crisis. Patriotism becomes fused with professional identity, and skepticism toward authority risks appearing unpatriotic or morally suspect. The problem for democratic communication emerges when journalism ceases to define its highest duty as independent scrutiny and instead begins from an assumption of trust toward state power. Under such conditions the press no longer merely reports political reality; it becomes emotionally integrated into the narratives of the state itself. Goss uses this moment to illustrate how the propaganda model operates not only through institutional structures but through habits of feeling, loyalty, identity, and professional culture. Journalists may sincerely believe they are acting responsibly while simultaneously internalizing assumptions that narrow the boundaries of acceptable criticism. The democratic ideal of the press as an adversarial institution dissolves into a system where journalists define responsible citizenship partly through deference to political authority during periods of war and emergency. The result is not overt dictatorship but a subtler form of ideological integration in which journalists voluntarily align themselves with national power under the language of civic duty.

This dynamic becomes dramatically visible in the Pentagon's covert program recruiting retired military officers to appear on television as supposedly neutral experts during the Iraq War. Goss describes how the Department of Defense assembled dozens of retired officers, subjected them to extensive briefings, granted them privileged access to Guantanamo and Iraq, and coached them

carefully on approved talking points before steering them toward television appearances. The operation aimed to achieve what officials described as “information dominance” through sophisticated psychological techniques directed not against foreign enemies but against the domestic American population itself. The retired officers appeared on news programs as authoritative military analysts, resembling former sports coaches calmly evaluating battlefield strategy for television audiences. Yet behind this performance lay a coordinated state propaganda effort involving carefully monitored messaging, professional incentives, patriotic appeals, and direct supervision by Pentagon contractors. Some participants who privately recognized that the Iraq occupation was deteriorating nevertheless reassured television viewers that extraordinary progress was occurring. The officers became “message force multipliers,” lending credibility to official narratives precisely because they appeared detached from direct government control. Goss emphasizes the disturbing irony that such operations occurred not within authoritarian state media systems but within privately owned American television networks claiming journalistic independence. The propaganda system therefore no longer depends primarily upon explicit censorship or direct state broadcasting. Instead, it functions through hybrid arrangements where private media voluntarily amplify government narratives using apparently independent intermediaries. The retired generals’ military prestige and cultivated television personas concealed their integration into a broader apparatus of ideological management. Although David Barstow’s Pulitzer Prize-winning investigation exposed the operation in painstaking detail, the revelations arrived too late to alter the political momentum surrounding the Iraq War significantly. This timing itself reflects a recurring problem within modern journalism: even major investigative successes often emerge only after public narratives have hardened and political decisions have become irreversible.

Goss then turns toward the broader culture of journalism itself, challenging the romantic mythology portraying reporters as perpetual rebels confronting authority. The heroic image of investigative journalists—represented symbolically through figures such as Nellie Bly, I.F. Stone, or Anna Politkovskaya—continues to dominate public imagination. Yet sociological studies reveal that journalists generally share the dominant political, economic, and cultural assumptions of the societies within which they operate. Herbert Gans observed that reporters possess more influence than ordinary citizens but nonetheless reproduce the prevailing values of elite institutions rather than fundamentally challenging them. Journalism therefore functions less as a permanent opposition force than as a mechanism through which dominant ideologies circulate under the appearance of neutrality. Jeff Gralnick’s remarks as a producer at ABC World News Tonight illustrate this mentality clearly. He insisted that his role was not to condemn public institutions morally but merely to contextualize the information authorities chose to provide. Such statements expose the limited conception of journalism embedded within mainstream news culture. Reporters frequently assume that their task is not to investigate power aggressively but to organize and present official information efficiently within the constraints of time and format. The watchdog ideal becomes secondary to the management of relationships with established sources.

The consequences of this culture become visible during moments of state abuse and secrecy. Goss points to the Abu Ghraib torture scandal and the warrantless surveillance programs under the Bush administration as examples where the press frequently chose caution and silence over sustained investigation. The New York Times famously delayed publication of the wiretapping story for over a year despite possessing substantial evidence because of pressure from the administration and concerns regarding national security. Journalism under such conditions reveals its deep dependence upon state legitimacy. Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* becomes essential here

because reporters are shaped by long-term socialization within institutional environments encouraging deference toward established power. Journalists working in Washington inhabit social worlds dominated by political officials, military spokespeople, elite experts, and prestigious bureaucracies. Access to information depends heavily upon maintaining acceptable relationships with these sources. The professional perks associated with elite journalism—special briefings, guided tours, exclusive access, privileged travel—create subtle psychological incentives discouraging radical skepticism. Even without explicit coercion journalists internalize the assumptions of the institutions upon which their careers depend. The press therefore becomes structurally inclined toward consensus and moderation not because reporters consciously conspire but because their professional environment rewards conformity and access over confrontation.

William Greider's reflections on his experiences at two different newspapers deepen this analysis by illustrating the class transformation of journalism itself. At the Cincinnati Post, Greider encountered a newsroom culture rooted more directly in working-class political sensibilities. Reporters expressed moral indignation openly and maintained stronger emotional connections to the communities they served. Journalism there retained a rougher, more populist character grounded in local grievances and democratic anger. By contrast, Greider's later experience at the Washington Post revealed a highly professionalized journalistic culture shaped by elite education, cosmopolitan sophistication, and social comfort with authority figures. Reporters at the Washington Post possessed greater technical expertise and institutional prestige, yet they were often less willing to challenge dominant power structures fundamentally. Greider famously summarized the contrast by describing the Washington Post as "strong on facts and weak on truth." This distinction is central to the propaganda model because journalism can accumulate enormous quantities of factual detail while still failing to interrogate the ideological assumptions organizing those facts into coherent narratives. Professional journalism frequently mistakes procedural objectivity for truthfulness while avoiding deeper structural questions concerning power, class, empire, or systemic violence. The press may report events accurately in narrow terms while reproducing the broader assumptions necessary to legitimize existing political arrangements.

The Reagan administration provides one of Goss's clearest case studies concerning sophisticated media management. Reagan's political team mastered the manipulation of news cycles by treating journalism itself as a strategic terrain requiring disciplined narrative control. Officials constructed daily "lines" determining how events would be framed and communicated throughout the federal apparatus. Every morning a core group of strategists established the narrative themes to be repeated consistently by administration spokespeople across government agencies. Journalists received coordinated messages from multiple official sources throughout the day, creating the impression of coherence, confidence, and inevitability. The administration understood that repetition itself generates legitimacy. Instructions such as "talk about the issues you want to talk about," "speak in one voice," and "repeat the same message many times" transformed political communication into an industrial process of narrative reproduction. Hertsgaard's comparison of journalists to "caged hamsters" dependent upon official feeding captures the structural dependency at the heart of modern journalism. Because reporters required constant information flows under severe deadline pressure, administrations capable of managing access strategically could shape news agendas remarkably effectively. Reagan's team supplemented this informational control with personal flattery, special briefings, selective access, and regular contact with network executives. Communications officials frequently telephoned journalists regarding forthcoming stories, encouraging adjustments favorable to administration narratives. Even seemingly minor interventions conditioned reporters to anticipate political reactions before publishing sensitive

material. The system worked not primarily through censorship but through anticipatory obedience, where journalists learned instinctively how to frame stories within acceptable boundaries.

Subsequent administrations refined these techniques further. Clinton's presidency initially encountered hostile press relations but eventually adopted more sophisticated forms of strategic communication through carefully managed tours, local media cultivation, and more personable spokespersons. Under George W. Bush, embedded journalism during the Iraq invasion represented a new stage in the fusion between military operations and media production. Reporters living and traveling with military units inevitably adopted perspectives shaped by the soldiers protecting and surrounding them daily. Studies cited by Goss demonstrated that embedded journalists relied overwhelmingly upon military sources and framed events in ways strongly aligned with administration narratives. Although embedding provided vivid frontline access, it also transformed journalists psychologically into participants within the military environment itself. The emotional intimacy of shared danger, logistical dependence, and institutional proximity narrowed the space for independent skepticism. Journalists embedded within combat units were not formally censored in the traditional sense. Instead, they were socially and emotionally absorbed into the worldview of the military institution they accompanied. The result was a journalism of proximity rather than critical distance.

Goss's discussion of "churnalism" extends the propaganda model into the economic routines of neoliberal media production. Contemporary journalism increasingly resembles industrial fast food production where reporters under severe time pressures recycle press releases, wire-service material, and prepackaged information rather than conducting original investigation. Newsrooms stripped of resources prioritize efficiency, volume, and speed over depth or verification. The term "churnalism" captures this mechanized production process where journalism becomes less an intellectual practice than an assembly-line operation processing information subsidies supplied by governments, corporations, think tanks, and public-relations agencies. Ethnographic studies reveal that journalists adapt themselves to the institutional values of their organizations, which are themselves shaped by commercial imperatives and managerial pressures. Economic constraints widen the divide between journalists and executives, yet the newsroom culture continues rewarding conformity to established professional norms. Internal memos guiding coverage, such as those pressuring Phil Donahue to include more pro-war voices before the Iraq invasion, expose how management interventions shape ideological balance indirectly. Even journalists aware of systemic pressures often struggle to resist because the routines of contemporary media production leave little room for sustained dissent or investigative independence.

The broader philosophical implication of Goss's analysis is that modern journalism increasingly functions as a system of ventriloquism where official power speaks through seemingly independent voices. Governments, corporations, military institutions, and elite experts provide the scripts, while journalists reproduce them under the appearance of objective reporting. The propaganda model therefore does not depict media manipulation as a crude conspiracy directed by omnipotent rulers. Rather, it reveals a system of routines, incentives, professional cultures, and institutional dependencies that naturally align journalism with dominant power structures. Patriotism, efficiency, professionalism, access, commercial pressure, and ideological conformity combine to produce a media environment where dissent exists only within carefully managed limits. The press retains the symbolic language of independence while operating increasingly as an extension of elite narrative management. Journalism becomes not the destruction of propaganda but one of its most sophisticated contemporary forms because it disguises obedience beneath rituals of neutrality, expertise, and professionalism. In this neoliberal communication order the

public encounters a spectacle of pluralism while the deeper structures of news production continue reproducing consensus favorable to political and economic authority.

Goss, B.M. (2013) Rebooting the Herman & Chomsky Propaganda Model in the Twenty-First Century. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

The Machinery of Retaliation / Flak and the Discipline of Dissent

Brian Michael Goss in *Rebooting the Herman & Chomsky Propaganda Model in the Twenty-First Century* examines the evolution of “flak” as one of the central disciplinary mechanisms within modern propaganda systems, demonstrating how dissent is managed not only through direct censorship but through coordinated campaigns of intimidation, harassment, emotional agitation, and reputational destruction. Goss begins with the dramatic case of Spanish magistrate Baltasar Garzón, whose legal efforts transformed him into one of the most internationally recognized defenders of universal human rights law. Garzón’s attempt in 1998 to secure the arrest of former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet while Pinochet was in London represented a profound symbolic rupture within global political culture. Although the United Kingdom ultimately refused to extradite Pinochet fully, the legal effort shattered the assumption that powerful state figures could forever remain protected behind national sovereignty and political immunity. The doctrine of universal jurisdiction introduced the possibility that crimes against humanity could transcend borders and historical silence. In Latin America especially, the symbolic force of Garzón’s actions weakened long-standing structures of impunity protecting military dictatorships and state violence. Yet Garzón’s broader career extended far beyond Pinochet. He pursued investigations into terrorism, organized crime, political corruption, state violence, and the hidden relations between power and illegality. His office prosecuted elements connected to al Qaeda, investigated the activities of Silvio Berlusconi’s media empire, examined corruption within the Spanish government, and pursued inquiries into state-sponsored counterterrorism abuses committed during Spain’s struggle against ETA. The irony, however, is that a judge internationally associated with the defense of human rights eventually became himself the target of a campaign designed to silence and destroy his legitimacy. When Garzón attempted to investigate crimes committed during the Franco dictatorship, he collided with the entrenched “pact of forgetting” underpinning Spain’s transition from fascism to parliamentary democracy. Extreme right-wing organizations mobilized legal attacks against him, eventually securing his disbarment. The historical inversion became almost grotesque: decades after Franco’s death, Spain was effectively punishing the judge who sought to investigate the dictatorship rather than the perpetrators of dictatorship itself. Goss uses this episode to illustrate how flak functions as a sophisticated mechanism protecting dominant ideological orders. Flak is not merely criticism; it is organized retaliation directed against those who challenge established systems of legitimacy.

Herman and Chomsky originally defined flak as the negative responses generated against media statements or programs in order to discipline behavior and reinforce ideological conformity. Traditionally, this included phone calls, editorials, complaints, lawsuits, petitions, and institutional pressure directed toward journalists or media organizations. Goss expands the concept considerably by showing that in the digital and neoliberal age flak has become far more diffuse, technologically amplified, emotionally charged, and socially pervasive. Tweets, emails, online campaigns, coordinated accusations, viral denunciations, think-tank reports, manufactured outrage, and endless digital repetition now create environments where dissenting voices can be overwhelmed rapidly by orchestrated hostility. Importantly, flak does not function neutrally. While

protests or criticism may sometimes emerge from marginalized groups, the structural power of flak overwhelmingly favors institutions already possessing resources, networks, legal influence, media access, and ideological legitimacy. Powerful interests can generate flak campaigns that appear spontaneous or grassroots while actually operating as extensions of organized political and economic power. Goss therefore compares certain forms of flak to “astroturfing,” where artificial movements imitate authentic public outrage while serving elite objectives. The appearance of democratic reaction conceals the structural asymmetry underlying the campaign. Garzón’s persecution illustrates this perfectly. His efforts to investigate authoritarian crimes represented an attempt to confront historical violence through law, yet right-wing organizations successfully transformed him into the object of suspicion and punishment. The machinery of flak reversed moral positions themselves, recasting accountability as extremism and portraying the defender of human rights as a dangerous transgressor against national stability.

Goss argues that the propaganda model has become even more relevant in the contemporary media environment because the structural filters identified by Herman and Chomsky have intensified rather than weakened. Ownership concentration has expanded dramatically, journalists rely increasingly upon elite-generated information subsidies, and the collapse of newsroom resources has deepened dependence upon public relations material and institutional sources. Although anticommunism as a specific Cold War ideology has faded, its deeper function survives through broader forms of dichotomization dividing the world into morally polarized categories of “Us” and “Them.” Within this environment flak operates with unprecedented speed and reach because digital communication bypasses many traditional journalistic gatekeeping mechanisms. Repetition itself creates legitimacy. Falsehoods, insinuations, emotional accusations, and ideological slogans circulate continuously until they acquire the appearance of truth through sheer visibility. Goss demonstrates this process through the example of the Media Research Center, an organization explicitly dedicated to attacking what it labels liberal bias within mainstream journalism. Although the organization presents itself with the language of research, analysis, and objectivity, its primary function is not the production of knowledge but the generation of ideological pressure. Reports are assembled selectively through cherry-picked quotations, dubious methodologies, and emotionally charged framing designed to reinforce predetermined right-wing narratives. Figures such as George Soros become symbolic enemies through campaigns that rely less upon rigorous evidence than upon repetition and emotional suggestion. Once circulated widely across conservative media ecosystems, these narratives acquire symbolic power regardless of factual accuracy. The Internet amplifies this effect because digital repetition fragments the distinction between evidence and visibility. A claim encountered repeatedly across multiple platforms begins to feel socially validated even if all sources originate from the same ideological machinery. Flak therefore evolves into a permanent environment of emotional intimidation where dissenting voices are not simply debated but overwhelmed through orchestrated hostility and reputational warfare.

The deeper significance of flak emerges when connected to the routines of journalism itself. Goss emphasizes that reporters operate within systems of dependency shaped by information subsidies supplied by governments, corporations, military institutions, think tanks, and public relations agencies. Herbert Gans observed that relationships between journalists and elite sources involve complex networks of obligation, trust, and professional reciprocity. Reporters rely upon these sources for continuous access to information, while sources depend upon journalists for visibility and legitimacy. Yet this relationship creates structural vulnerability because journalists risk losing access if they challenge official narratives too aggressively. The Watergate scandal itself illustrates this paradox. The story was not initially broken by White House correspondents precisely because

reporters deeply embedded within official institutions feared damaging relationships essential to their professional survival. Journalism's dependence upon elite access therefore limits the extent of adversarial investigation structurally. The system rewards conformity and moderation while punishing excessive skepticism through exclusion, professional marginalization, or intensified flak.

Goss then connects flak to the broader phenomenon of "churnalism," where journalists overwhelmed by shrinking resources and accelerated production schedules increasingly rely upon press releases, wire services, official statements, and prepackaged information. Modern journalism becomes less an investigative practice than an industrial system of processing elite-generated narratives rapidly for mass consumption. Under such conditions the ideological assumptions embedded within information subsidies travel through news systems with minimal scrutiny. The professional culture of journalism itself adapts to these pressures. Reporters may continue imagining themselves as independent truth-seekers, yet their daily routines encourage dependence upon efficiency, consensus, and institutional credibility rather than radical inquiry. News organizations reward speed, access, and volume while discouraging forms of investigation requiring time, resources, or confrontation with powerful interests. The result is a press system structurally inclined toward reproducing dominant assumptions while maintaining the symbolic appearance of independence.

The Reagan administration's sophisticated news management operations provide one of Goss's clearest demonstrations of how modern propaganda functions through routine rather than overt censorship. Reagan's communication strategists understood that controlling the daily "line" of political interpretation mattered as much as controlling facts themselves. Every morning officials coordinated narrative themes that would be repeated consistently throughout government and media appearances. Journalists, dependent upon official sources and constrained by deadlines, absorbed and redistributed these narratives with remarkable uniformity. Hertsgaard's image of reporters as "caged hamsters" captures the structural dependency at work. Journalists required constant informational feeding from official institutions, allowing administrations to shape public discourse through repetition, emotional framing, and strategic access. Reagan's team supplemented these informational controls with personal flattery, carefully orchestrated briefings, and regular contact with media executives. Even small interventions conditioned journalists to anticipate the political preferences of power before publishing sensitive material. The propaganda system therefore worked less through coercion than through anticipatory adaptation. Reporters internalized the expectations of dominant institutions until conformity appeared professionally natural.

This process intensified during the Iraq War through embedded journalism, where reporters lived and traveled alongside military units. Studies cited by Goss reveal that embedded reporters relied overwhelmingly upon military sources and framed events in ways strongly favorable to the Bush administration's objectives. The emotional intimacy created through shared danger, logistical dependency, and institutional proximity transformed journalism psychologically. Reporters became participants within the military environment rather than detached observers of it. Although embedding was justified as access-enhancing transparency, it simultaneously narrowed the conceptual boundaries within which the war could be interpreted. Journalists absorbed the worldview of the soldiers protecting them, making structural criticism of the invasion increasingly difficult. Military narratives became the experiential horizon through which reality itself was encountered.

Goss also examines the role of digital media in this transformed propaganda landscape. Many early cyber-utopian visions predicted that the Internet would democratize communication and undermine centralized media power. Yet economic realities complicated this optimism. Online advertising revenues remained far lower than traditional print income, and many of the most influential digital news platforms became extensions of established media corporations rather than genuine alternatives. Aggregators and viral circulation systems often amplified dominant narratives rather than challenging them. The Internet multiplied speed, repetition, and emotional intensity while leaving underlying ownership structures and economic incentives largely intact. Indeed, digital systems often intensified flak because coordinated campaigns could now mobilize instantly across enormous communication networks. The architecture of online visibility favored outrage, repetition, emotional polarization, and symbolic simplification. Under these conditions propaganda became more decentralized yet also more pervasive because ideological pressure could emerge simultaneously from official institutions, partisan organizations, social networks, and algorithmically amplified outrage cycles.

The philosophical core of Goss's analysis lies in the recognition that modern propaganda no longer depends primarily upon silence or explicit censorship. Contemporary systems of control operate through visibility itself: through overwhelming repetition, emotional intimidation, strategic sourcing, professional dependency, commercial acceleration, and reputational warfare. Flak functions as a disciplinary environment teaching journalists, intellectuals, and citizens alike which forms of speech will trigger social punishment. The press retains the symbolic rituals of independence while increasingly functioning inside systems designed to reward ideological obedience and marginalize disruptive inquiry. Journalists may still expose isolated scandals, yet the deeper structures shaping public discourse remain remarkably resilient because the very routines of journalism reproduce elite narratives continuously. The propaganda model therefore remains essential not because it imagines omnipotent conspirators secretly controlling all communication but because it reveals how institutional pressures, economic incentives, professional habits, and ideological mechanisms combine to manufacture conformity while preserving the appearance of pluralism. In this neoliberal media order truth itself becomes vulnerable to exhaustion, repetition, and managed outrage, while dissent survives only precariously within the narrowing boundaries tolerated by concentrated systems of power.

Goss, B.M. (2013) Rebooting the Herman & Chomsky Propaganda Model in the Twenty-First Century. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

The Architecture of Consent / Filtering Consciousness in the Corporate Age

Joan Pedro-Carañana, Daniel Broudy, and Jeffery Klaehn in *The Propaganda Model Today: Filtering Perception and Awareness* present a contemporary reexamination of the Propaganda Model first introduced by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent*. Their introduction positions the model not merely as a historical critique of Cold War media systems but as an evolving analytical framework capable of explaining the enduring relationship between mass communication, political authority, and economic domination in the twenty-first century. Drawing inspiration from figures such as Malcolm X, Eduardo Galeano, Herman, and Chomsky, the text argues that modern systems of communication increasingly shape the emotional, intellectual, and moral boundaries through which populations perceive reality itself. The media do not simply report events; they actively organize consciousness by controlling the spectrum of acceptable interpretation. In this sense, propaganda is not understood as crude

censorship or overt state manipulation alone but as a sophisticated institutional process embedded within liberal capitalist societies that present themselves as defenders of free expression while simultaneously narrowing the possibilities of genuine democratic debate.

The authors emphasize that the Propaganda Model emerged originally from Herman and Chomsky's attempt to explain why corporate media systems consistently reproduce elite interests despite the formal existence of press freedom, competition, and journalistic professionalism. The central insight of the model lies in its identification of structural filters—ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak, and ideological control—which systematically shape media content before it reaches public consciousness. These filters do not require centralized conspiracy or explicit commands because they operate through institutional logic, economic dependency, and professional adaptation. News organizations internalize the assumptions and interests of dominant power structures until ideological conformity appears natural, objective, and professionally responsible. The introduction stresses that while individual journalists may possess integrity or critical intentions, they function within systems designed structurally to privilege elite narratives and marginalize disruptive perspectives. The resulting media environment does not eliminate disagreement entirely; rather, it permits lively debate only within carefully managed boundaries that leave the fundamental structures of economic and political power unquestioned. Chomsky's observation that the “smart way” to maintain obedience is to limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion while encouraging intense debate within those limits becomes central to the text's philosophical orientation. What appears as pluralism often conceals a deeper ideological uniformity.

Pedro-Carañana, Broudy, and Klaehn further argue that the Propaganda Model has frequently been marginalized or distorted within mainstream academic and journalistic discourse precisely because its conclusions challenge the legitimacy of dominant liberal assumptions about media independence. Herman and Chomsky themselves predicted that the model would be dismissed, caricatured, or ignored because it exposed structural contradictions at the heart of capitalist democracies. Yet despite decades of criticism, the model continues generating powerful explanatory insights because its simplicity reveals systemic tendencies repeatedly observable across diverse historical contexts. The enduring relevance of the model lies in its capacity to explain how corporate and state power shape public perception not through totalitarian suppression but through institutional filtering mechanisms that determine visibility, legitimacy, and interpretive framing. The text therefore situates the Propaganda Model within a broader political economy tradition emphasizing material structures of domination rather than isolated acts of journalistic misconduct or individual bias.

The authors connect the model explicitly to Marxian and radical traditions of media criticism while also distinguishing it from purely class-reductionist approaches. Although rooted in materialist analysis, the Propaganda Model focuses less on abstract economic contradictions and more on the concrete institutional relationships linking media corporations, political elites, advertisers, bureaucratic power, and ideological systems. The media become instruments through which dominant groups maintain social stability, manufacture consent, and reproduce inequalities by shaping the cultural environment in which political understanding occurs. In capitalist societies where private ownership of communication systems predominates, market mechanisms replace overt state censorship as the principal means of ideological control. The media are not compelled forcibly to support elite interests; rather, their economic survival depends upon alignment with those interests. Profit maximization, advertising dependency, and access to authoritative sources create structural incentives favoring narratives compatible with existing power arrangements.

Under such conditions journalism becomes integrated into the maintenance of social order itself. Against this reality, the introduction contrasts the ideal democratic function of the media. In principle, a genuinely democratic communication system would empower citizens, foster critical consciousness, encourage participation in public life, and provide diverse perspectives enabling meaningful debate over social priorities. Such a media environment would cultivate active citizenship rather than passive spectatorship. Yet the authors argue that contemporary corporate media systems increasingly undermine these democratic possibilities by transforming communication into a commodity subordinated to commercial and political imperatives. The mediation of reality through mass communication profoundly shapes collective consciousness, influencing not only what people know but also how they imagine society, power, justice, and change. The restriction of public discourse therefore limits political imagination itself. Citizens cannot pursue alternatives they are never permitted to conceptualize seriously within dominant communication structures.

Particularly significant within the introduction is the discussion of liberal media institutions. The Propaganda Model originally challenged conservative assumptions that mainstream media possessed radical or left-wing bias by demonstrating instead that even ostensibly liberal outlets largely reproduce elite consensus. The contemporary authors extend this argument by examining how liberal corporate media often function through what they describe as “progressive neoliberalism.” Under this framework, media institutions embrace symbolic forms of diversity and inclusion while simultaneously marginalizing critiques of deeper economic inequality and structural exploitation. Questions of gender, race, and identity may receive visibility insofar as they remain compatible with market logics and corporate branding, yet challenges to capitalism, militarism, or concentrated economic power remain constrained. Liberal media thereby present themselves as morally progressive while protecting the underlying economic order generating inequality itself. Debate becomes confined to managerial reforms and symbolic representation rather than systemic transformation. The authors suggest that this narrowing of discourse prevents populations from imagining fundamentally different social arrangements beyond neoliberal capitalism. The structure of the volume itself reflects the ambition to expand and update the Propaganda Model globally and technologically. The introduction outlines four major sections addressing theoretical developments, digital communication systems, applications to entertainment and sports media, and international case studies spanning countries such as the United States, Canada, Spain, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Latin America. This global orientation underscores the adaptability of the model across diverse institutional environments. While media systems differ culturally and politically, the structural pressures identified by Herman and Chomsky repeatedly manifest wherever concentrated economic power intersects with communication industries. The editors therefore position the Propaganda Model not as a rigid doctrine but as a flexible analytical framework capable of evolving alongside technological and geopolitical transformations.

A crucial dimension of the introduction concerns the relationship between digital technology and propaganda. Early utopian narratives surrounding the internet promised democratized communication, decentralized information flows, and the collapse of traditional gatekeeping institutions. Yet the authors argue that digital platforms frequently reproduce and intensify existing power structures rather than dismantling them. Globalization, media concentration, algorithmic visibility systems, and advertising-based revenue models continue shaping online discourse in ways remarkably consistent with the original filters of the Propaganda Model. Corporate ownership extends into digital infrastructures, while attention economies prioritize emotionally

stimulating content compatible with commercial imperatives. Alternative media certainly exist online, yet they remain marginalized relative to the immense visibility and institutional power of dominant platforms and corporate news organizations. The internet expands communicative volume without necessarily democratizing communicative power. Indeed, digital systems often accelerate ideological fragmentation, surveillance, emotional manipulation, and algorithmic control while preserving the dominance of elite narratives through platform architecture itself. The introduction also emphasizes the importance of alternative media systems in resisting propaganda structures. Community radio, cooperative journalism, reader-supported publications, and independent digital outlets offer possibilities for more democratic communication by challenging mainstream narratives and amplifying marginalized perspectives. Figures such as Amy Goodman and organizations like Democracy Now! illustrate both the potential and vulnerability of alternative journalism. These outlets frequently encounter intensified flak, financial precarity, limited distribution, and political hostility precisely because they disrupt the consensus manufactured by corporate media systems. Nonetheless, the existence of alternative communication networks demonstrates that propaganda systems are never absolute or uncontested. Spaces of resistance persist even within heavily concentrated media environments.

The philosophical implications of the introduction are profound. The authors suggest that propaganda in liberal democracies functions not primarily through direct repression but through the management of perception itself. By controlling the range of legitimate narratives, dominant institutions shape emotional identification, moral judgment, and political possibility. Malcolm X's warning that newspapers can cause populations to "hate the people who are being oppressed, and love the people who are doing the oppressing" encapsulates the ethical inversion underlying modern propaganda systems. Media institutions define who counts as a victim, whose suffering deserves visibility, which forms of violence appear legitimate, and which political realities remain imaginable. Edward Herman's claim that propaganda systems allow crimes to occur "without limit" reflects the terrifying power of normalized narratives to erase moral accountability. Eduardo Galeano's observation that modern communication systems hold "the many" *incomunicado* through the power of "the few" reveals the paradox of hyper-connected societies in which informational abundance coexists with deep ideological restriction. Ultimately, Pedro-Carañana, Broudy, and Klaehn argue that the Propaganda Model remains indispensable precisely because contemporary societies continue presenting systems of concentrated communication power as expressions of freedom and democracy. The model exposes how liberal media systems manufacture legitimacy for dominant economic and political interests while preserving the appearance of pluralism and independent journalism. Ownership concentration, advertising dependency, elite sourcing, organized flak, and ideological framing continue shaping media narratives globally, even as technologies evolve. The introduction therefore calls not only for academic analysis but for democratic vigilance. Genuine freedom of expression requires more than formal press liberty; it demands communication systems capable of supporting critical consciousness, public empowerment, and meaningful democratic participation. Without such transformation, the media remain instruments not of liberation but of managed perception, sustaining a world where public awareness itself becomes filtered through the imperatives of power.

Pedro-Carañana, J., Broudy, D. and Klaehn, J. (2018) The Propaganda Model Today: Filtering Perception and Awareness. London: University of Westminster Press.

The Invisible Discipline / Ideology and the Management of Consciousness

Jeffery Klaehn, Joan Pedro-Carañana, Matthew Alford, and Yigal Godler in their interview with Edward S. Herman titled “Ideological Hegemony in Contemporary Societies” revisit the Propaganda Model not as a historical artifact of Cold War criticism but as a living framework for understanding how modern systems of power organize consciousness through communication. Herman presents the central argument that social control within advanced capitalist societies has become so normalized that it frequently appears natural, inevitable, and even democratic. Modern elites no longer depend primarily upon direct censorship or visible authoritarian coercion. Instead, power sustains itself through the management of information, institutional ideology, and the shaping of public awareness. As economic inequality expands, the necessity for controlling communication systems becomes increasingly important because dominant groups must secure legitimacy for social arrangements that overwhelmingly benefit a minority. Those possessing wealth and institutional influence therefore seek to maintain ownership over the symbolic machinery that produces meaning, values, and public perception. The control of communication becomes inseparable from the preservation of privilege itself. Herman suggests that the modern propaganda system functions most effectively when populations believe themselves free while unconsciously absorbing narratives designed to reinforce the existing order.

Within this process academia occupies a crucial institutional position. Herman explains that universities, research institutions, and intellectual culture form a major component of ideological production because they shape both professional expertise and the boundaries of legitimate public discourse. Although academic environments possess some degree of independence due to traditions of scholarship and inquiry, this autonomy is heavily constrained by funding pressures, institutional incentives, and the demand for conformity with dominant assumptions. The Propaganda Model itself encountered resistance within academia precisely because it challenged the deeply entrenched liberal belief that mainstream media primarily serve democratic interests rather than elite power. Herman references Andrew Mullen’s study showing that only a tiny percentage of major communications journals even acknowledged the Propaganda Model, usually only briefly and dismissively. Such marginalization reflects not merely intellectual disagreement but structural discomfort with analyses exposing the institutional foundations of ideological control. Academic systems, like media systems, often reward perspectives compatible with dominant power structures while sidelining critiques threatening institutional legitimacy. Thus, intellectual exclusion itself becomes part of the propaganda process. Radical criticism is not necessarily censored explicitly; it is simply denied visibility, prestige, funding, and professional normalization. Herman insists, however, that the Propaganda Model remains fundamentally democratic in orientation because it seeks to explain why public opinion so frequently diverges from official policy while mainstream media continue supporting elite agendas. He cites the example of so-called “free trade” agreements, which are typically framed by media institutions as expressions of economic progress and modernization despite widespread public hostility toward them. According to Herman, such agreements are not genuinely about free exchange but about expanding the rights and mobility of investors and corporations. Yet mainstream media systematically present them through elite perspectives while marginalizing broader democratic concerns about labor, inequality, sovereignty, and social welfare. The Propaganda Model therefore becomes valuable precisely because it reveals why media institutions consistently privilege elite consensus even when public opinion resists it. Media systems do not merely report political reality; they organize acceptable interpretations of that reality in ways favorable to concentrated power.

A major theme of the interview is the global applicability of the Propaganda Model. Herman argues that the model functions effectively wherever similar structural conditions prevail: concentrated private ownership, commercial dependency on advertising, and significant inequalities of wealth and power. The model is therefore not confined to the United States but extends across much of the neoliberal world order. Studies conducted in countries such as Britain and Germany demonstrate that despite cultural differences, media institutions repeatedly display the same structural tendencies toward elite alignment, official sourcing, and ideological filtering. Globalization has intensified rather than weakened these patterns because transnational corporate power increasingly dominates communication systems internationally. Media concentration, commercial pressures, and neoliberal policies produce remarkably similar forms of informational control across national boundaries. In this sense, the Propaganda Model reveals not isolated national distortions but systemic characteristics of capitalist communication structures globally. The interview also addresses television and the internet as central communication forms within contemporary society. Herman explains that television fits naturally within the Propaganda Model because it remains deeply dependent upon advertising revenue and audience commodification. Television news is therefore shaped by commercial imperatives that privilege spectacle, emotional simplification, and institutional conformity over substantive democratic inquiry. More revealing, however, is Herman's discussion of digital media. Early enthusiasm surrounding the internet imagined it as a decentralized democratic force capable of bypassing traditional gatekeepers and empowering independent voices. Yet Herman argues that the evolution of the internet has largely reinforced existing concentrations of power rather than dismantling them. Platforms such as Google and Facebook rapidly consolidated dominance over digital communication while remaining heavily dependent upon advertising revenue and cooperative relationships with state institutions. Herman observes that these corporations have demonstrated substantial deference toward agencies such as the CIA, NSA, FBI, and State Department. Rather than functioning as autonomous democratic spaces, digital platforms increasingly operate as extensions of broader systems of surveillance, commercial extraction, and ideological management. The democratic potential of the internet therefore remains sharply limited within capitalist structures prioritizing profit, data control, and institutional alliances with political power.

Another significant dimension of Herman's analysis concerns the production of public indifference. He argues that mainstream media foster passivity not only through misinformation but through distraction, superficiality, and the systematic neglect of perspectives addressing the deeper concerns of ordinary populations. Media institutions excel at amusement, entertainment, and emotional stimulation while avoiding substantive examination of structural inequality, economic exploitation, militarism, or ecological crisis. The public becomes saturated with spectacle while remaining disconnected from meaningful analysis of the forces shaping their lives. This cultivated indifference serves elite interests because populations unable to conceptualize alternatives are less likely to challenge the status quo. Citizens may feel frustrated, anxious, or dissatisfied without fully understanding the structural roots of their condition. Herman suggests that propaganda succeeds most effectively not when populations actively believe every official narrative but when they remain distracted, fragmented, exhausted, or politically disengaged. Fear occupies a particularly important role within ideological hegemony. Herman explains that fear functions by directing public attention toward approved enemies while diverting scrutiny away from systemic inequalities and elite interests. He invokes Thorstein Veblen's observation that warlike policies help shift popular attention away from domestic inequities such as uneven wealth distribution and unequal access to resources. Fear therefore operates as a mechanism of displacement. By constructing external enemies, security threats, or ideological dangers, elites

mobilize emotional energies that might otherwise challenge internal structures of power. The enemy may change historically—from communism to terrorism to geopolitical rivals—but the deeper function remains constant: maintaining social cohesion around elite authority through emotional management and symbolic conflict. Under such conditions populations become psychologically invested in defending the system responsible for their own marginalization.

The interview's discussion of Donald Trump's election and presidency further illustrates the flexibility of the Propaganda Model. Herman notes that mainstream media overwhelmingly favored Hillary Clinton during the 2016 election campaign, reflecting the preferences of many institutional elites. Yet Trump simultaneously received enormous amounts of free media exposure because his inflammatory rhetoric, spectacle-driven style, and demagogic performances generated ratings and audience engagement highly profitable for commercial media organizations. The system therefore amplified Trump even while many media institutions formally opposed him. Once Trump entered office, however, mainstream media increasingly adopted a hostile stance while simultaneously promoting intense Russo-phobic narratives alongside Democratic Party elites. Herman interprets this shift through the Propaganda Model by emphasizing how media systems adapt dynamically to elite divisions while remaining structurally tied to broader institutional interests. Media criticism of Trump did not fundamentally challenge the underlying structures of American militarism, capitalism, or imperial power. Instead, conflict remained largely confined within elite-approved boundaries. Herman strongly rejects criticisms claiming that the model's filters are arbitrary or conspiratorial. Each filter—ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak, and ideology—is grounded in concrete institutional realities demonstrably shaping media production. Ownership structures determine economic priorities; advertising creates commercial dependency; sourcing routines privilege official voices; flak disciplines deviation; and ideological systems frame moral legitimacy. These filters emerge not from secret coordination but from observable organizational pressures embedded within capitalist communication systems. The model does not require omnipotent conspirators because institutional actors frequently share assumptions, incentives, and interests organically. Ideological conformity arises structurally through professional adaptation, economic necessity, and institutional culture.

Particularly revealing is Herman's explanation of flak. Critics sometimes argue that because flak involves conscious efforts to influence media output, it cannot function as an impersonal structural filter. Herman rejects this distinction by noting that media systems themselves involve conscious choices constantly shaped by organized pressures from governments, corporations, lobbying groups, and political organizations. The deliberate character of flak does not make it less systemic. Rather, repeated campaigns of criticism, intimidation, reputational attack, and organized pressure create environments where journalists and institutions internalize constraints preemptively. Fear of backlash encourages self-censorship and ideological moderation even before overt punishment becomes necessary. Flak therefore operates simultaneously as an institutional process and a psychological environment disciplining acceptable discourse. Toward the conclusion of the interview Herman reflects upon the continuing usefulness of the Propaganda Model within the twenty-first century. In the short and medium term he believes the model remains extremely relevant because commercial media and advertising-based communication systems continue expanding globally. Yet Herman also expresses concern regarding deeper historical crises looming over contemporary civilization. Nuclear threats, ecological collapse, intensifying inequality, militarization, and the possible emergence of new forms of authoritarianism or fascism create uncertain futures. Under conditions of severe instability, communication systems may become even more centralized, manipulative, and repressive as elites attempt to preserve control amid

escalating crises. The propaganda system therefore cannot be understood merely as a media phenomenon; it is part of a broader struggle over social power, legitimacy, and the future organization of society itself.

The philosophical significance of Herman's reflections lies in their exposure of how ideology becomes embedded institutionally within everyday life. Modern propaganda functions less through visible coercion than through normalization. Communication systems define reality by determining which perspectives appear reasonable, which fears seem legitimate, which voices possess authority, and which possibilities remain imaginable. Academia, journalism, digital platforms, entertainment systems, and political discourse together form an interconnected ideological environment shaping consciousness continuously. The danger identified by Herman is not simply that populations are deceived occasionally but that entire societies become structured around managed awareness where elite priorities define the limits of public understanding itself. The Propaganda Model endures because it reveals the invisible architecture through which democratic language coexists with concentrated power, and through which systems claiming to defend freedom simultaneously manufacture obedience, passivity, and ideological conformity.

Pedro-Carañana, J., Broudy, D. and Klaehn, J. (2018) The Propaganda Model Today: Filtering Perception and Awareness. London: University of Westminster Press.

The Discipline of Objectivity / Journalism and the Manufacture of Conformity

Jesse Owen Hearn-Branaman in "What the Propaganda Model Can Learn from the Sociology of Journalism" attempts to deepen and refine Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model by integrating sociological insights into the behavior, professional culture, and institutional conditioning of journalists themselves. While the original Propaganda Model focused primarily upon political economy, ownership structures, advertising dependence, sourcing patterns, flak, and ideological systems, Hearn-Branaman argues that a complete understanding of media power also requires close examination of how journalists are socialized into professional norms that reproduce elite discourse almost automatically. The chapter therefore bridges two traditions often treated separately: the structural analysis of corporate media systems and the sociological study of newsroom culture, professional identity, and journalistic routine. The result is a more psychologically and institutionally complex explanation of why mainstream journalism consistently reflects dominant ideological assumptions without requiring direct conspiratorial coordination.

Hearn-Branaman begins by identifying one of the central criticisms repeatedly directed against the Propaganda Model: its apparent neglect of journalists as individual actors. Critics frequently argue that Herman and Chomsky's framework reduces reporters to passive instruments of institutional power while overlooking the lived realities of newsroom work, professional ethics, organizational pressures, and individual decision-making. The Propaganda Model, according to these criticisms, explains structures but not people. Hearn-Branaman acknowledges that the model intentionally prioritizes systemic factors over personal motives because Chomsky himself maintained that examining the internal thoughts of individual journalists is far less productive than analyzing the institutional machinery shaping media output. In Chomsky's formulation, journalists resemble interchangeable components within a larger ideological apparatus. What matters is not the subjective sincerity or morality of any particular reporter but the structural environment determining what kinds of journalism are possible, rewarded, or marginalized. Yet Hearn-Branaman argues that this does not mean sociological questions should be abandoned. Instead,

sociological theory can strengthen the Propaganda Model by explaining precisely how journalists become integrated into institutional systems and how professional norms themselves function as additional filters reinforcing elite perspectives. Central to this argument is the concept of journalistic professionalism. Mainstream liberal ideology frequently presents professionalism as evidence of media independence and ethical integrity. Journalists are portrayed as neutral truth-seekers governed by standards of objectivity, balance, impartiality, and factual rigor. Hearn-Branaman, however, demonstrates that professionalism often operates less as a defense against institutional power than as a mechanism through which institutional power is reproduced invisibly. The professionalization of journalism during the twentieth century created an appearance of autonomy separating reporters symbolically from direct ownership control, yet this same process encouraged reliance upon routines and practices highly compatible with elite interests. Professional journalism privileges official sources, avoids broad structural critique, emphasizes episodic reporting over systemic analysis, and treats market assumptions as neutral common sense. News organizations cultivate trust precisely by presenting themselves as detached from ideology, even while their routines systematically align with dominant political and economic perspectives. In this sense professionalism becomes a cultural smokescreen concealing deeper relations of power.

Hearn-Branaman draws upon Robert McChesney's work to show that the institutional norms associated with professionalism mirror the original filters of the Propaganda Model closely. Dependence upon official sources reflects the sourcing filter; reluctance to challenge advertisers or corporate interests aligns with ownership and advertising pressures; avoidance of controversial structural critique reflects ideological filtering and anticipatory flak. Journalists trained professionally therefore internalize forms of behavior that appear ethically responsible while simultaneously reproducing dominant assumptions. The resulting conformity is not necessarily experienced consciously as censorship because it manifests through definitions of credibility, balance, objectivity, and responsible reporting. Journalists believe they are following professional standards even when those standards systematically privilege elite narratives. The concept of socialization becomes crucial in explaining this process. Hearn-Branaman distinguishes between primary socialization occurring during childhood and secondary socialization unfolding within educational institutions, workplaces, and professional cultures. Journalists entering the profession encounter newsroom environments governed by implicit expectations regarding tone, sourcing, framing, and acceptable inquiry. Through everyday interaction they gradually absorb institutional norms shaping both conscious decisions and unconscious assumptions. Ethnographic studies such as those conducted by Herbert Gans reveal that journalists learn quickly which topics are safe, which sources are authoritative, which narratives are rewarded, and which forms of investigation risk professional repercussions. This process produces forms of self-censorship that may remain largely invisible even to the journalists themselves. Reporters do not necessarily receive explicit orders suppressing dissenting perspectives; rather, they internalize practical understandings about career advancement, credibility, and institutional belonging.

Hearn-Branaman highlights Chomsky's hypothetical example regarding the reporting of atrocities. When allegations emerge against official enemies or vested interests, journalists require relatively little evidence before reporting aggressively because institutional assumptions already support the legitimacy of such accusations. Yet when dissident voices challenge dominant narratives or accuse powerful allies of wrongdoing, journalists demand extraordinary levels of proof and verification before proceeding. This asymmetry does not arise solely from conscious political bias but from the professional risks associated with challenging powerful institutions. The

threat of flak, loss of access, damaged credibility, or career stagnation encourages reporters to remain within established boundaries of legitimacy. Socialization therefore shapes journalistic behavior through anticipatory adaptation. Reporters learn not merely what to write but how reality itself is professionally interpreted. A major contribution of the chapter lies in its rejection of simplistic conspiracy interpretations. Critics of the Propaganda Model often caricature it as suggesting that millions of journalists consciously coordinate to deceive the public according to secret elite directives. Hearn-Branaman argues that this misunderstanding confuses institutional ideology with deliberate conspiracy. The Propaganda Model does not require journalists to function as conscious propagandists. Instead, institutional structures and professional cultures produce homogenous discourse through routine adaptation, economic dependency, and ideological normalization. Journalists operating under similar institutional pressures predictably generate similar narratives without needing explicit coordination. The media “frame” reality not because reporters gather secretly to manipulate audiences but because newsroom cultures, sourcing practices, professional expectations, ownership structures, and economic incentives collectively shape what appears credible, important, or even thinkable.

Hearn-Branaman responds directly to critics such as Corner who argue that this perspective implies mass self-delusion among journalists. Yet the chapter insists that all institutional systems shape the consciousness of those operating within them. Journalists are no more uniquely self-deluded than workers in any other industrial structure. Just as factory workers focus upon specialized tasks without fully confronting the broader social consequences of industrial production, journalists concentrate upon professional routines without necessarily reflecting critically upon the ideological implications of institutional practice. The routines themselves become naturalized. Reporters experience professional objectivity as ethical virtue while rarely questioning how institutional definitions of objectivity already embody political assumptions. Journalism therefore reproduces ideological conformity not through overt indoctrination but through normalized professional behavior embedded within organizational systems. The chapter further emphasizes the dual nature of journalistic agency. Critics often accuse the Propaganda Model of portraying journalists simultaneously as passive victims and active collaborators. Hearn-Branaman argues that this tension reflects a genuine characteristic of journalism itself rather than a flaw in the model. Journalists possess limited autonomy within institutional constraints. They negotiate constantly between professional independence and organizational conformity. Reporters may occasionally resist official narratives, pursue investigative work, or challenge institutional assumptions, yet such acts occur within environments structurally favoring adaptation to elite interests. The key insight of the Propaganda Model remains that individual acts of dissent rarely overcome the overwhelming influence of systemic pressures shaping media production overall.

Importantly, Hearn-Branaman argues that sociological insights should be understood not as alternatives to political economy but as complementary dimensions of the same system. Structural forces such as ownership concentration, advertising dependence, and market imperatives create the institutional conditions within which professional cultures emerge. Journalism’s sociological patterns cannot be separated from the economic organization of communication systems. Professional norms develop historically in response to institutional requirements. Objectivity, neutrality, and official sourcing become functional strategies allowing media corporations to maintain legitimacy, avoid controversy, attract advertisers, and preserve elite access. Thus, professionalism itself becomes economically and politically conditioned. The sociology of journalism reveals how structural power becomes psychologically internalized within professional

identity. The philosophical implications of Hearn-Branaman's argument are profound because they challenge liberal myths surrounding journalistic independence while avoiding crude determinism. The chapter suggests that ideological control within modern societies operates most effectively when embedded within ordinary routines appearing natural, ethical, and professionally necessary. Journalists rarely perceive themselves as instruments of propaganda precisely because propaganda no longer depends primarily upon explicit manipulation. Instead, institutional systems cultivate forms of subjectivity aligned with dominant power structures. Reporters internalize definitions of responsible journalism that simultaneously limit the scope of permissible inquiry. The boundaries of discourse become embedded within professional common sense itself.

This integration of sociology and political economy therefore strengthens the Propaganda Model substantially. By incorporating concepts such as professionalism, secondary socialization, and self-censorship, Hearn-Branaman demonstrates how institutional ideology reproduces itself through everyday journalistic practice. Media conformity emerges not simply from external coercion but from the internalization of organizational values and professional expectations. The newsroom becomes a site where structural power shapes consciousness continuously through routines, incentives, fears, and aspirations. Journalists adapt to institutional environments much as citizens adapt to broader ideological systems. The resulting homogeneity of mainstream discourse reflects the combined force of economic concentration and sociological conditioning. Ultimately, Hearn-Branaman argues that understanding journalism requires simultaneous attention to structural and human dimensions. Political economy explains the architecture of media power, while sociology explains how individuals become integrated into that architecture through professional culture and institutional adaptation. Together these perspectives reveal why mainstream journalism consistently reproduces elite narratives even in the absence of centralized conspiracy. The media system functions ideologically not because journalists are uniquely malicious or dishonest but because institutional structures shape the production of reality itself. Professionalism, objectivity, and newsroom routine become mechanisms through which power sustains legitimacy while preserving the appearance of democratic independence. In this sense the sociology of journalism does not weaken the Propaganda Model; it reveals the subtle psychological and institutional processes through which propaganda becomes normalized as ordinary professional practice.

Hearn-Branaman, J.O. (2018) 'What the Propaganda Model Can Learn from the Sociology of Journalism', in Pedro-Carañana, J., Broudy, D. and Klaehn, J. (eds.) The Propaganda Model Today: Filtering Perception and Awareness. London: University of Westminster Press.

The Machinery of Persuasion / Beyond the Filters of Consent

Piers Robinson in "Does the Propaganda Model Actually Theorise Propaganda?" revisits Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model not in order to reject it, but to interrogate one of its deepest limitations: the extent to which the model truly explains the production of propaganda itself. Robinson acknowledges that the Propaganda Model remains one of the most influential and powerful critiques of corporate media ever developed, particularly because it demonstrates how structural forces such as ownership concentration, advertising dependence, sourcing practices, flak, and ideological conditioning shape news output in ways that consistently privilege elite interests. Yet Robinson argues that the model, despite its immense explanatory power regarding media performance, leaves underdeveloped the prior stages through which propaganda is actively designed, coordinated, manufactured, and inserted into public discourse before it even reaches

journalists and news institutions. The chapter therefore seeks to expand the Propaganda Model beyond its emphasis upon media filtering by examining the wider networks, institutions, and strategic operations involved in constructing propagandised realities within modern liberal democracies.

Robinson begins by situating the Propaganda Model historically within the intellectual climate that followed the publication of *Manufacturing Consent*. Herman and Chomsky's original framework was initially met with hostility, dismissal, and marginalisation within mainstream academic circles. Critics frequently condemned the model as simplistic, conspiratorial, reductionist, or ideologically driven. The association with Noam Chomsky himself often intensified this hostility, with some scholars privately advising others to distance themselves from his work in order to preserve professional legitimacy. Despite this institutional resistance, Robinson observes that many of the core assumptions of the Propaganda Model have gradually entered critical media scholarship and become increasingly difficult to dismiss. Contemporary analyses of media-state relations now commonly acknowledge patterns of elite sourcing, ideological conformity, corporate influence, and systemic bias that Herman and Chomsky identified decades earlier. In this sense the Propaganda Model has evolved from intellectual outcast to an influential reference point within critical communication studies. Yet Robinson insists that the partial acceptance of the model has also revealed its theoretical incompleteness. The Propaganda Model successfully explains why mainstream corporate media reproduce elite perspectives, but it does not sufficiently theorize how those elite perspectives are themselves strategically produced and circulated through broader propaganda systems. Robinson argues that the model primarily examines the downstream filtering process occurring inside corporate media institutions while paying comparatively little attention to the upstream production of propaganda conducted by governments, intelligence agencies, corporations, think tanks, public relations firms, NGOs, and other actors involved in information management. As a result, the Propaganda Model illuminates only one dimension of propaganda systems: the institutional mechanisms that normalize and distribute elite narratives. It explains why journalists tend to reproduce dominant viewpoints, but it does not adequately explain how those viewpoints are initially engineered, coordinated, and strategically disseminated across society.

This distinction between propaganda production and propaganda filtration becomes the chapter's central theoretical intervention. Robinson notes that several elite-centered media theories—including Bennett's indexing hypothesis, Hallin's spheres of consensus and deviance, and Entman's cascading activation model—share a similar limitation. These approaches acknowledge that journalists rely heavily upon official sources and that media discourse tends to follow elite debate, but they rarely investigate how governments and power centers proactively shape the informational environment long before journalists encounter it. In other words, they examine media dependence without sufficiently examining the organized systems of persuasion manipulating that dependency. Robinson therefore calls for a broader conception of propaganda capable of integrating political communication, psychological operations, strategic deception, public relations, and institutional coordination into a unified framework. The chapter argues that propaganda is not simply the result of structural filtering but an active and continuous exercise of power involving deliberate strategies designed to manipulate public perception and constrain democratic understanding. Robinson insists that propaganda production includes lying, distortion, omission, selective emphasis, emotional framing, distraction, fear manipulation, and narrative engineering. These strategies are employed systematically by state and corporate actors seeking to manufacture ideological environments favorable to their interests. Modern propaganda therefore

extends far beyond crude censorship or simplistic state messaging. It functions through complex networks of institutional cooperation in which multiple actors collectively shape the boundaries of public knowledge while preserving the appearance of democratic openness and informational pluralism.

Robinson emphasizes that governments are no longer the sole or even primary producers of propaganda. Public relations industries, corporate communication firms, think tanks, NGOs, academic institutions, military information operations, and intelligence services all participate in constructing persuasive narratives that eventually enter mainstream discourse. These institutions frequently overlap in personnel, funding, ideological orientation, and strategic objectives. Think tanks produce expert commentary legitimizing policy agendas. Academic specialists provide authoritative interpretations supporting official narratives. NGOs sometimes function as humanitarian legitimizers for interventionist policies. Intelligence agencies conduct psychological operations and strategic leaks. Public relations firms manufacture emotional narratives capable of influencing both journalists and public opinion. The cumulative effect is the creation of an integrated informational ecosystem where elite perspectives circulate across multiple institutions before reaching the media. Journalists therefore encounter narratives already embedded within structures of authority, expertise, and legitimacy. A particularly important insight within Robinson's argument concerns the growing imbalance between journalism and public relations. Contemporary communication systems are increasingly dominated by professional persuasion industries whose resources vastly exceed those available to investigative journalism. The number of PR workers now dramatically surpasses the number of journalists in many countries, creating an environment where information subsidies provided by powerful institutions shape news agendas extensively. Journalists facing shrinking budgets, accelerated deadlines, and declining institutional support become increasingly dependent upon pre-packaged narratives, press releases, expert briefings, and official talking points. Propaganda thus becomes embedded within the normal informational flow of society rather than appearing as exceptional manipulation. The institutional asymmetry between organized propaganda producers and weakened journalistic institutions further reinforces elite control over public discourse.

Robinson's critique also carries important philosophical implications regarding liberal democracy itself. Traditional democratic theory assumes that free media provide citizens with sufficient information to evaluate political decisions rationally and hold power accountable. Yet if information environments are systematically engineered by coordinated networks of elite institutions, then democratic deliberation becomes fundamentally distorted. Citizens may formally possess freedom of speech and access to media, yet the informational conditions necessary for meaningful democratic autonomy are compromised. Propaganda operates not by eliminating dissent entirely but by shaping the broader interpretive frameworks through which reality is understood. Public debate may appear lively and diverse while remaining confined within assumptions carefully managed by elite institutions. The chapter therefore expands the concept of propaganda beyond simplistic notions of manipulation. Robinson argues that propaganda should be understood as an exercise of structural power operating through institutions capable of defining social reality itself. The production of propaganda involves controlling narratives, setting agendas, privileging certain interpretations, excluding inconvenient evidence, and managing emotional responses. Crucially, these processes do not require centralized conspiracies. Coordination often emerges organically because institutions sharing similar interests reinforce one another's perspectives through overlapping networks of influence and mutual dependency. Propaganda

systems therefore function through structural convergence rather than necessarily through explicit command hierarchies.

Robinson does not reject the original Propaganda Model's emphasis on ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak, and ideology. Instead, he seeks to deepen and extend its explanatory reach by situating media filtering within a wider architecture of information management. The original model remains indispensable because it reveals why corporate media are structurally predisposed to reproduce elite narratives. However, Robinson argues that understanding propaganda fully requires examining the earlier stages where narratives are strategically constructed and inserted into public discourse by networks of institutional actors operating across political, corporate, military, and cultural domains. Media institutions become only one node within a broader propaganda apparatus permeating contemporary society. The chapter also highlights how modern propaganda increasingly blurs boundaries between truth and persuasion. Information management strategies frequently combine factual fragments with emotional framing, selective omission, and strategic context manipulation. Propaganda does not necessarily require outright fabrication; it often operates more effectively through partial truths arranged within misleading interpretive structures. This subtlety makes propaganda more difficult to identify because audiences continue encountering recognizable facts while remaining unaware of the larger narrative architecture shaping interpretation. Modern propaganda therefore depends heavily upon credibility, professionalism, expertise, and institutional legitimacy rather than overt coercion alone.

Robinson's intervention is especially significant because it reframes the Propaganda Model as an unfinished analytical project rather than a closed theoretical system. The chapter suggests that Herman and Chomsky provided the foundations for understanding corporate media performance, but subsequent scholarship must continue expanding the model to address evolving mechanisms of ideological control within increasingly complex communication environments. The rise of digital platforms, strategic communication industries, hybrid warfare, and psychological operations intensifies the need for broader propaganda analysis capable of tracing how narratives move across institutional networks before crystallizing into public common sense. At its deepest level, the chapter presents propaganda as inseparable from the exercise of power itself. Political and economic elites require systems capable of managing perception, organizing consent, neutralizing dissent, and maintaining legitimacy within formally democratic societies. The media do not simply fail accidentally or sporadically; they function within structures designed to privilege elite interests while marginalizing transformative perspectives. Yet Robinson insists that exposing these processes remains essential for democratic accountability. By mapping the institutional networks, strategic operations, and persuasive mechanisms involved in propaganda production, critical scholarship can challenge the invisibility upon which modern systems of ideological power depend.

Ultimately, Robinson argues that the future development of the Propaganda Model depends upon integrating political economy with a broader analysis of strategic communication and information warfare. The original model explained how news becomes filtered through corporate media institutions, but contemporary conditions require examining how propaganda itself is actively manufactured through coordinated networks extending far beyond journalism alone. Such an expanded framework would offer a more comprehensive understanding of how modern liberal democracies manage public consciousness while preserving the appearance of free and independent communication. The result is a vision of propaganda not as occasional deception but as a permanent structural feature of contemporary power relations, operating continuously through the production, circulation, and normalization of elite-controlled narratives.

Robinson, P. (2018) 'Does the Propaganda Model Actually Theorise Propaganda?', in Pedro-Carañana, J., Broudy, D. and Klaehn, J. (eds.) *The Propaganda Model Today: Filtering Perception and Awareness*. London: University of Westminster Press.

The Algorithmic Cathedral / Consent in the Digital Empire

Christian Fuchs in "Propaganda 2.0: Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model in the Age of the Internet, Big Data and Social Media" revisits the foundational structure of the Propaganda Model in order to examine whether the transformations brought by digital capitalism, social media, and Big Data technologies have weakened or strengthened the mechanisms of ideological control first identified by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky. Rather than declaring the internet a revolutionary force that has liberated communication from centralized power, Fuchs argues that digital technologies have intensified many of the structural tendencies already present within capitalist media systems. The rise of social media platforms, algorithmic communication, data surveillance, and online advertising has not abolished propaganda but has instead created a more sophisticated and deeply integrated form of ideological management. Propaganda in the digital age no longer depends solely upon newspapers and television networks; it now operates through global information infrastructures controlled by transnational technology corporations that possess unprecedented capacities to shape visibility, behavior, and public consciousness.

Fuchs begins by situating the discussion historically within the enormous geopolitical and economic transformations that have occurred since the publication of *Manufacturing Consent* in 1988. The collapse of the Soviet Union removed the Cold War framework that originally structured much of the ideological environment analyzed by Herman and Chomsky. Yet rather than producing a more democratic and egalitarian world, the decades that followed witnessed the triumph of neoliberal capitalism, the intensification of financialization, growing inequality, austerity policies, and the expansion of digital corporate power. These developments coincided with a crisis within traditional journalism as advertising revenues migrated away from newspapers and toward internet platforms. Simultaneously, new communication technologies emerged that fundamentally altered the circulation of information: Google, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, blogs, data analytics systems, and algorithmically curated social media environments became central mechanisms through which individuals encounter political reality. Fuchs therefore asks whether the original Propaganda Model remains relevant under these radically altered technological conditions. The chapter argues firmly that the Propaganda Model remains not only relevant but indispensable. The five original filters identified by Herman and Chomsky—ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak, and ideology—continue to shape media communication, although they now operate through new technological forms and institutional arrangements. Fuchs emphasizes that despite the rhetoric of decentralization associated with the internet, contemporary digital communication systems are highly concentrated. Ownership remains centralized in the hands of a few immensely powerful corporations whose economic and political influence rivals or exceeds that of earlier media conglomerates. Companies such as Google and Facebook dominate global information flows while simultaneously collecting massive quantities of behavioral data from billions of users. These corporations do not merely distribute information; they organize the very architecture through which information becomes visible or invisible.

Fuchs argues that social media platforms have become new gatekeepers of public consciousness. Their algorithmic systems determine which content users encounter, which voices gain amplification, and which narratives remain marginalized. Unlike earlier media systems where

editors and broadcasters visibly shaped public discourse, digital propaganda operates through opaque computational mechanisms hidden beneath the appearance of user freedom and participation. Algorithms prioritize content according to commercial imperatives designed to maximize engagement, advertising revenue, and data extraction. Consequently, visibility itself becomes commodified. Users believe they are freely navigating an open informational landscape while their experiences are subtly managed through systems optimized for profit and behavioral manipulation. The ownership filter identified by Herman and Chomsky therefore acquires intensified significance within digital capitalism. Google and Facebook possess extraordinary concentrations of economic and informational power. Their structures of corporate governance ensure that decision-making authority remains concentrated among small groups of executives and dominant shareholders. Fuchs notes that these platforms exercise enormous influence over political communication while remaining largely unaccountable to democratic oversight. Their control over search results, news feeds, recommendation systems, and advertising infrastructures enables them to shape public discourse on a planetary scale. Far from dissolving media concentration, the internet has facilitated new monopolistic forms of communication power.

Advertising also remains central within Propaganda 2.0. Digital media systems are fundamentally organized around surveillance capitalism, where user behavior itself becomes the commodity sold to advertisers. Social media platforms collect detailed information regarding users' preferences, movements, emotional reactions, relationships, and political interests. This data is then used to deliver targeted advertisements and personalized content designed to maximize engagement and profitability. Advertising no longer merely funds media institutions externally; it has become woven directly into the architecture of communication itself. Users are continuously monitored, categorized, and monetized through algorithmic systems that transform human interaction into economic value. The digital environment therefore intensifies the commodification of communication far beyond what Herman and Chomsky originally described. Fuchs further argues that the sourcing filter persists within digital communication despite the apparent decentralization of online content production. Traditional news organizations continue to dominate online journalism, and they remain heavily dependent upon official government, corporate, and institutional sources. Even within social media ecosystems, elite institutions possess disproportionate visibility and communicative power because they command greater resources, organizational capacity, and technological access. Governments, corporations, public relations firms, and think tanks continue shaping narratives that circulate widely across digital networks. Moreover, shrinking newsroom budgets and economic pressures intensify journalists' dependence upon pre-packaged information subsidies provided by powerful institutions. Thus the internet has not eliminated structural dependency upon elite sources but has instead integrated those dependencies into faster and more diffuse communication systems.

The concept of flak also evolves significantly within Propaganda 2.0. Herman and Chomsky originally described flak as organized negative responses designed to discipline media institutions and journalists who deviate from elite expectations. Fuchs argues that digital technologies have dramatically expanded the mechanisms through which flak operates. Social media campaigns, coordinated trolling, online harassment, digital lobbying, bot networks, algorithmic amplification, and viral outrage campaigns now function as powerful instruments capable of policing discourse rapidly and aggressively. Flak in the digital age spreads instantaneously across global networks, creating environments where journalists, academics, activists, and ordinary individuals may face enormous pressure for expressing dissenting perspectives. Digital communication systems therefore intensify the speed, scale, and emotional force of disciplinary responses. The ideological

filter originally centered on anti-communism has likewise transformed rather than disappeared. Fuchs argues that neoliberal ideology now functions as the dominant legitimating framework within digital capitalism. The belief in market solutions, technological progress, entrepreneurial individualism, consumer freedom, and the inevitability of capitalist globalization permeates contemporary media discourse. Social media platforms themselves embody neoliberal assumptions by framing communication as a market-driven activity organized through private corporate ownership rather than democratic public infrastructure. Digital technologies are often portrayed as inherently liberating and democratizing while their underlying power relations remain obscured. The ideology of technological inevitability further discourages critical examination of how algorithmic systems reinforce inequality and elite control.

One of Fuchs's most important contributions lies in his emphasis upon Big Data as a new dimension of propaganda. Digital communication systems generate vast quantities of behavioral information that can be analyzed, predicted, and manipulated through computational techniques. Big Data allows corporations and political actors to monitor public sentiment, identify vulnerabilities, personalize persuasion strategies, and target individuals with extraordinary precision. Propaganda therefore becomes increasingly individualized and invisible. Rather than broadcasting uniform messages to mass audiences, digital propaganda systems adapt dynamically to users' psychological profiles and behavioral patterns. This transformation represents a profound evolution in the history of ideological control because surveillance and persuasion become deeply integrated within everyday communication practices. Fuchs also rejects the optimistic assumption that the internet naturally produces democratic pluralism. While digital technologies have enabled alternative media and activist communication, these possibilities remain constrained by the economic structures governing online platforms. Many of the most popular news websites are extensions of traditional corporate media institutions, while algorithms favor commercially profitable content over critical or transformative perspectives. Moreover, online advertising systems reward sensationalism, emotional polarization, and rapid engagement rather than reflective democratic deliberation. As a result, the internet often reproduces and intensifies existing power structures instead of dismantling them.

The chapter presents digital communication as fundamentally contradictory. On one hand, social media and online networks possess genuine emancipatory potential because they lower barriers to participation and facilitate alternative forms of communication. Activist movements, independent journalism, and oppositional communities can use digital tools to challenge dominant narratives and organize resistance. On the other hand, these same technologies operate within capitalist systems driven by surveillance, commodification, and corporate concentration. The democratic promise of the internet therefore remains constrained by the economic imperatives shaping its infrastructure. Fuchs emphasizes that contemporary propaganda no longer relies solely upon censorship or centralized control. Instead, it operates through algorithmic visibility, data extraction, personalized targeting, emotional manipulation, and platform governance. Individuals experience digital environments as spaces of freedom and participation while remaining embedded within systems designed to maximize profitability and behavioral predictability. The result is a subtle form of ideological management where consent is manufactured not through overt coercion but through the continuous shaping of informational environments and communicative possibilities.

Another major concern involves the crisis of traditional journalism itself. As advertising revenue shifts toward technology platforms, newspapers and investigative institutions face severe economic decline. Newsrooms shrink, foreign bureaus disappear, and journalistic labor becomes

increasingly precarious. This weakening of professional journalism further enhances the influence of public relations industries, corporate communication, and algorithmically amplified misinformation. The decline of independent investigative capacity therefore creates conditions where elite narratives circulate with reduced scrutiny. Fuchs ultimately argues that the Propaganda Model must be expanded rather than abandoned. The original framework remains invaluable because the structural logic identified by Herman and Chomsky continues operating within digital capitalism. However, contemporary conditions require incorporating algorithmic control, data commodification, platform monopolies, digital surveillance, and automated political communication into the analysis. Propaganda 2.0 thus represents an attempt to synthesize critical political economy with the realities of networked communication and computational power. At its deepest level, the chapter portrays digital capitalism as creating a new form of ideological domination in which communication technologies become instruments for organizing social behavior and consciousness on a massive scale. The internet has not transcended the political economy of propaganda; it has transformed propaganda into a more diffuse, personalized, and technologically sophisticated system integrated into everyday life itself. The apparent openness and interactivity of social media conceal infrastructures of surveillance, commodification, and algorithmic governance that continue privileging elite interests while limiting the possibilities for genuinely democratic communication.

Fuchs concludes that understanding contemporary media power requires confronting the convergence of capitalism, technology, and ideology within digital communication systems. The future of democracy depends not only upon access to information but upon democratic control over the infrastructures that organize visibility, participation, and knowledge itself. Without such transformation, the internet risks becoming not a space of liberation but a vast algorithmic apparatus for manufacturing consent within an increasingly unequal and surveilled society.

Fuchs, C. (2018) 'Propaganda 2.0: Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model in the Age of the Internet, Big Data and Social Media', in Pedro-Carañana, J., Broudy, D. and Klaehn, J. (eds.) The Propaganda Model Today: Filtering Perception and Awareness. London: University of Westminster Press.

The Digital Cathedral / Algorithms of Manufactured Reality

Christian Fuchs in Propaganda 2.0: Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model in the Age of the Internet, Big Data and Social Media revisits the original framework of the Propaganda Model in order to determine whether the rise of digital communication technologies has fundamentally altered the mechanisms through which propaganda operates in capitalist societies. Nearly three decades after the publication of Manufacturing Consent, the geopolitical and economic landscape has undergone profound transformation. The Soviet Union has disappeared, neoliberal globalization has intensified, financialization has deepened economic inequality, and recurring crises such as the collapse of 2008 and the expansion of austerity politics have generated widespread insecurity, nationalism, xenophobia, and social fragmentation. At the same time, traditional journalism has entered a prolonged structural crisis as advertising revenues migrated from newspapers and broadcast media toward digital monopolies such as Google and Facebook. Social media platforms, search engines, Big Data systems, algorithmic recommendation networks, and interactive communication infrastructures now dominate the production and circulation of information. Yet Fuchs argues that these transformations have not invalidated Herman and Chomsky's theory. On the contrary, the rise of digital capitalism has reinforced and expanded the

very dynamics identified in the original Propaganda Model, creating what may be understood as a more technologically advanced and deeply integrated system of ideological management.

Fuchs begins by revisiting the five classic filters outlined by Herman and Chomsky: concentrated ownership, advertising dependency, sourcing practices, flak, and ideological control. These filters continue to shape communication systems because the fundamental inequalities of wealth and power that structure capitalist societies remain intact. What has changed is the technological environment through which these filters now operate. Ownership remains concentrated in the hands of a tiny number of powerful actors, yet the scale of concentration within digital communication infrastructures exceeds previous forms of media centralization. Companies such as Google, Facebook, and other digital giants now function not merely as media corporations but as global information empires controlling the architecture of communication itself. Their algorithms determine what content becomes visible, which voices gain amplification, and how users navigate political and cultural information. The internet, once celebrated as a decentralized democratic frontier, has evolved into a system dominated by highly concentrated corporate entities possessing immense influence over public consciousness. These corporations are controlled by small circles of executives and shareholders whose economic and ideological interests shape the digital public sphere in ways largely hidden from ordinary users. The concentration of ownership has therefore not disappeared in the digital age; it has become more abstract, more globalized, and more deeply embedded within everyday social interaction.

Advertising, the second filter, has likewise intensified rather than weakened. Traditional media relied upon advertising revenue to sustain operations, but digital capitalism has transformed advertising into a far more invasive and comprehensive mechanism of social control. Social media platforms and search engines generate enormous profits through the commodification of personal data and the surveillance of user behavior. Every interaction, preference, movement, emotional response, and social connection becomes measurable information that can be sold to advertisers or used to shape future behavior. The audience itself has become the commodity in an unprecedented sense. Users are no longer simply consuming advertisements; their identities, desires, habits, fears, and social relations are continuously monitored, categorized, and monetized through algorithmic systems. This process creates a new form of propaganda rooted in behavioral prediction and emotional manipulation. Content is prioritized not according to democratic value or informational significance but according to its ability to generate engagement, maximize advertising revenue, and sustain continuous participation within the platform ecosystem. As traditional newspapers lose revenue and collapse financially, technology corporations absorb increasing control over the flow of information, reinforcing a communication order dominated by market imperatives rather than public interest.

Fuchs also demonstrates that sourcing remains a decisive filter despite the illusion of decentralization associated with digital media. Although millions of individuals can technically publish information online, the most influential narratives continue to originate from institutional centers of power. Traditional media organizations still dominate much online journalism, and these organizations remain heavily dependent upon official sources such as governments, corporations, military institutions, think tanks, and professional public relations networks. Journalists facing shrinking budgets, accelerating deadlines, and increasing economic pressure rely even more heavily upon pre-packaged information subsidies provided by powerful institutions. Digital communication technologies have accelerated the circulation of information without fundamentally altering the hierarchical relationship between media and elite sources. Official narratives spread rapidly through interconnected networks of news organizations, social media

platforms, and algorithmic recommendation systems, creating the appearance of plurality while reproducing a narrow ideological spectrum. Search engines and social platforms often amplify already dominant institutions because their algorithms privilege visibility, popularity, and existing authority. As a result, alternative perspectives struggle to gain sustained attention even within supposedly open digital environments.

The concept of flak has also evolved significantly within the digital age. Herman and Chomsky originally described flak as organized negative responses designed to discipline journalists and media institutions that deviate from elite interests. In the online era, flak has multiplied in speed, scale, and intensity. Digital technologies have created new mechanisms for coordinated outrage, harassment campaigns, trolling operations, automated bot activity, and algorithmically amplified attacks designed to intimidate dissenting voices. Governments, corporations, ideological organizations, and partisan networks now possess the ability to generate massive waves of digital pressure capable of shaping public discourse and disciplining critics almost instantaneously. Social media outrage cycles create environments where journalists, academics, activists, and ordinary citizens face constant pressure to conform to dominant narratives or risk reputational destruction. Flak no longer depends solely upon letters, lawsuits, or institutional complaints; it now circulates through viral campaigns capable of overwhelming dissent through emotional intensity and algorithmic amplification. This expansion of flak reinforces ideological conformity while preserving the illusion of spontaneous democratic participation.

Fuchs argues further that the ideological filter originally centered on anti-communism has transformed into a broader neoliberal faith in the market, technological progress, and capitalist inevitability. During the Cold War, anti-communism functioned as a unifying ideological mechanism that justified military intervention, corporate power, and the suppression of dissent. In the post-Cold War era, neoliberal ideology fulfills a similar role by presenting market capitalism, privatization, competition, and technological innovation as natural and unquestionable features of social life. Digital corporations are frequently portrayed as engines of democratization and human empowerment even as they intensify surveillance, commodification, and social inequality. The ideology of technological solutionism encourages the belief that digital platforms inherently expand freedom and participation, thereby obscuring the economic structures and power relations underlying these systems. The “miracle of the market” has become a contemporary secular religion shaping how political and economic reality is interpreted across both traditional and digital media environments.

A major contribution of Fuchs’s analysis lies in his emphasis upon Big Data as a new mechanism of propaganda and social control. Digital communication systems generate enormous quantities of behavioral information that can be analyzed, predicted, and manipulated using computational technologies. This creates conditions for personalized propaganda in which political messaging, advertising, and ideological narratives can be targeted toward specific individuals or demographic groups with extraordinary precision. Unlike earlier forms of mass propaganda aimed at broad populations, digital propaganda can adapt dynamically to users’ psychological profiles, fears, desires, and social identities. Political communication increasingly relies upon algorithmic targeting, emotional manipulation, and data analytics designed to influence behavior invisibly. Propaganda therefore becomes embedded directly within the architecture of digital life itself, functioning continuously through recommendation systems, news feeds, notifications, and personalized advertising streams.

Despite the rhetoric celebrating social media as tools of democratic empowerment, Fuchs insists that digital platforms often reproduce existing inequalities rather than dismantling them. The internet certainly enables new forms of activism, alternative media production, and oppositional communication, but these possibilities remain constrained by the overwhelming economic and organizational power of corporate technology giants. Many of the most influential online news sources are extensions of traditional media institutions, while independent voices struggle for visibility within algorithmically governed environments designed to reward engagement, profitability, and ideological conformity. The architecture of digital communication therefore reflects the same structural inequalities present within capitalist society itself. The promise of democratized communication remains largely unrealized because the underlying infrastructures of the internet remain privately owned and commercially driven.

The chapter also explores the crisis of journalism under digital capitalism. Traditional newspapers and investigative media organizations face declining revenues as advertising migrates online, leading to staff reductions, newsroom closures, and the collapse of foreign bureaus. Investigative journalism becomes increasingly difficult to sustain financially, while public relations industries expand rapidly. The imbalance between journalists and PR professionals intensifies the dependence of news organizations upon institutional information subsidies. Under these conditions, the capacity of journalism to challenge state and corporate power weakens significantly. Digital communication technologies accelerate the speed of information circulation while simultaneously undermining the institutional foundations necessary for critical investigative reporting. At its philosophical core, Fuchs's argument suggests that digital capitalism has created a new stage in the evolution of propaganda systems. The original Propaganda Model explained how concentrated ownership, advertising dependence, elite sourcing, flak, and ideological control shaped mass media narratives. Propaganda 2.0 demonstrates that these same structural forces continue operating within digital environments while acquiring new forms through algorithms, surveillance systems, data commodification, and platform monopolies. The internet has not abolished propaganda but transformed it into a more personalized, invisible, and technologically sophisticated system deeply integrated into everyday life. Individuals experience digital communication as interactive participation and personal freedom while remaining embedded within infrastructures designed to predict, monetize, and influence their behavior continuously.

Fuchs ultimately argues that understanding contemporary media power requires integrating political economy with critical analyses of digital technology, algorithmic governance, and surveillance capitalism. The future of democratic communication depends not merely upon access to information but upon democratic control over the infrastructures organizing communication itself. Without such transformation, digital media risk becoming a vast technological apparatus for manufacturing consent, managing behavior, and reinforcing elite domination under the appearance of openness and participation. The expansion of the Propaganda Model into the digital era therefore reveals not the decline of ideological control but its mutation into a more pervasive and deeply embedded form operating through the invisible architectures of networked capitalism.

Fuchs, C. (2018) 'Propaganda 2.0: Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model in the Age of the Internet, Big Data and Social Media', in Pedro-Carañana, J., Broudy, D. and Klaehn, J. (eds.) The Propaganda Model Today: Filtering Perception and Awareness. London: University of Westminster Press.

The Architecture of Manufactured Reality / Engines of Invisible Persuasion

Alan MacLeod in *Propaganda in the Information Age: Still Manufacturing Consent* presents a sweeping examination of how modern media systems continue to function as instruments of elite domination despite dramatic technological transformations. Building upon the foundational insights of Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent*, MacLeod argues that the mechanisms of propaganda have not disappeared with the rise of the internet, digital communication, and social media; rather, they have evolved into more sophisticated and pervasive forms. The central thesis of the text is that the media, far from operating as neutral institutions devoted to informing the public and defending democracy, serve as powerful ideological apparatuses that manufacture consent for the political and economic interests of dominant elites. Media organizations are deeply embedded within structures of corporate ownership, advertising dependence, political alliances, and market imperatives that shape not only the content of information but the entire framework through which reality itself is interpreted. In this sense, propaganda is not an occasional distortion of an otherwise healthy democratic system; it is a permanent structural condition of contemporary capitalist society.

MacLeod begins by challenging one of the most deeply rooted assumptions of liberal democracy: the belief that the media exists primarily to protect the public interest by holding power accountable. According to this idealized narrative, journalists function as courageous watchdogs who expose corruption, investigate abuses, and provide citizens with the information necessary for democratic self-government. MacLeod argues that this self-image is profoundly misleading because it ignores the structural realities governing media institutions. The media is not an independent actor standing outside systems of power; it is itself a central component of those systems. The ownership structures of modern communication industries reveal the extent to which a tiny number of corporations dominate global flows of information. Major conglomerates such as Comcast, Disney, News Corporation, AT&T, and National Amusements control enormous sections of television, film, publishing, news production, telecommunications, and digital infrastructure. This concentration of ownership means that public discourse is increasingly filtered through institutions whose economic interests are fundamentally tied to the preservation of existing power arrangements.

MacLeod insists that the concentration of media ownership represents one of the defining political realities of the modern age. While liberal societies celebrate freedom of the press as evidence of democratic openness, actual communication systems are dominated by corporations whose interests overlap with those of financial institutions, governments, military industries, and transnational capital. The result is a communication order in which dissenting perspectives are marginalized not primarily through overt censorship but through structural exclusion. Media systems present themselves as pluralistic and competitive, yet the range of acceptable opinion remains narrowly constrained by elite assumptions regarding capitalism, nationalism, militarism, and market ideology. Public debate is therefore permitted only within boundaries that do not threaten the underlying distribution of power. Central to MacLeod's argument is the idea that propaganda in democratic societies functions differently from propaganda in openly authoritarian regimes. In dictatorships, ideological control is often maintained through visible coercion, censorship, and state repression. In liberal capitalist societies, propaganda is more sophisticated precisely because it appears voluntary, decentralized, and natural. Citizens are not generally forced to consume propaganda at gunpoint; instead, propaganda is woven invisibly into entertainment, advertising, journalism, public relations, consumer culture, and digital communication. This subtlety makes propaganda more effective because individuals frequently fail to recognize the

extent to which their perceptions are being shaped. The modern citizen is immersed within a symbolic environment saturated by narratives that normalize inequality, consumerism, nationalism, and obedience to elite authority.

Drawing upon Walter Lippmann's famous description of the public as a "bewildered herd," MacLeod explains that elite institutions have long viewed ordinary citizens as irrational masses requiring careful management through the manufacture of "necessary illusions." The role of the media is therefore not simply to provide information but to stabilize existing systems of power by controlling public consciousness. Through repetition, framing, omission, emotional manipulation, and selective visibility, media institutions determine what populations perceive as important, dangerous, moral, or inevitable. The media shapes not only what people think about but the categories through which they understand political and social reality itself. MacLeod places particular emphasis on the extraordinary authority modern media exercises over collective perception. Ben Bagdikian's observation that mass media determines what societies regard as true or false, real or imaginary, meaningful or insignificant becomes central to the analysis. Most individuals do not directly experience international conflicts, economic crises, political negotiations, or foreign societies; instead, their understanding of these realities is mediated almost entirely through representations produced by corporate communication systems. Media narratives therefore possess immense power to manufacture emotional responses and political attitudes. The example of Iraq before the 2003 invasion illustrates this dynamic vividly. In the United States, public fear concerning Saddam Hussein and alleged weapons of mass destruction was cultivated through relentless repetition of government narratives amplified by mainstream media outlets. Claims later proven false were presented with certainty and urgency, creating an atmosphere in which military intervention appeared not only reasonable but morally necessary. The media thus participated directly in manufacturing consent for war by transforming speculation and propaganda into accepted public truth.

The text further incorporates the insights of Australian psychologist Alex Carey, who argued that the twentieth century was characterized by the simultaneous expansion of democracy, corporate power, and propaganda. As formal political freedoms expanded, systems of ideological management became more complex and psychologically refined. Modern propaganda no longer relies primarily upon crude slogans or overt censorship; it functions through advertising, branding, public relations, entertainment, celebrity culture, and emotional manipulation. Individuals encounter thousands of persuasive messages every day, shaping desires, fears, aspirations, and political assumptions in ways that support consumer capitalism and elite authority. Propaganda becomes embedded within ordinary life itself, making it difficult to distinguish manipulation from common sense. At the heart of MacLeod's analysis stands Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model, which he presents as one of the most powerful frameworks ever developed for understanding media behavior in capitalist democracies. According to the model, news reaching the public must pass through five structural filters that systematically shape media content in ways favorable to elite interests. These filters are not conspiratorial mechanisms directed by a central authority but structural conditions emerging naturally from the organization of capitalist media systems. The first filter is concentrated ownership. Media corporations are profit-driven businesses integrated into broader systems of economic power. Their owners and executives possess extensive ties to financial institutions, governments, military industries, and corporate networks. Because media institutions themselves are components of elite structures, they rarely challenge the legitimacy of capitalism or the interests of dominant power centers.

The second filter involves dependence on advertising. Most media organizations rely heavily on corporate advertisers for revenue, meaning that profitability depends upon attracting affluent consumers desirable to advertisers. Journalism therefore becomes subordinated to commercial imperatives. Stories likely to threaten corporate interests, encourage anti-consumerist thinking, or expose systemic exploitation are discouraged because they conflict with the economic foundations of the media itself. The audience becomes the commodity sold to advertisers, while news content is shaped to maintain consumer confidence and market stability. The third filter concerns sourcing. Journalists operate under constant pressure to produce large volumes of content rapidly and efficiently. As a result, they depend heavily upon official sources such as governments, corporations, military institutions, think tanks, and public relations agencies. These institutions possess enormous resources for generating information subsidies in the form of press releases, briefings, expert interviews, and staged events. Because official sources appear authoritative and reliable, journalists reproduce their assumptions and narratives with limited scrutiny. During the lead-up to the Iraq War, for example, mainstream media overwhelmingly echoed government claims concerning Iraqi weapons programs while marginalizing dissenting experts who questioned the evidence.

The fourth filter is flak, meaning organized negative responses aimed at disciplining media organizations or journalists who deviate from acceptable narratives. Governments, corporations, lobbying groups, think tanks, and ideological organizations generate complaints, lawsuits, public outrage, political attacks, and reputational pressure to punish dissent. Journalists quickly learn that challenging powerful interests can result in professional isolation, loss of access, accusations of bias, or career damage. This creates a culture of self-censorship in which conformity becomes the safest professional strategy. The fifth filter originally centered on anti-communism as the dominant ideological framework of the Cold War era. MacLeod explains that while anti-communism has evolved, its broader function persists through neoliberal ideology, nationalism, anti-terror rhetoric, and market fundamentalism. Media narratives continue to divide the world into morally legitimate and illegitimate actors according to elite geopolitical interests. Victims of enemy states receive extensive emotional attention, while victims of allied governments or Western interventions are minimized or ignored. Elections in countries aligned with U.S. interests are typically celebrated as democratic achievements, whereas elections in adversarial states are framed as illegitimate regardless of actual circumstances. This ideological framing creates a moral universe that legitimizes Western power while obscuring structural violence committed by dominant institutions.

MacLeod also addresses criticisms frequently directed against the Propaganda Model. Mainstream commentators often dismiss the model as overly deterministic or conspiratorial because it challenges cherished assumptions regarding journalistic independence and democratic pluralism. Yet MacLeod argues that the enduring significance of Manufacturing Consent lies precisely in its structural focus. Media bias is not explained primarily by the malicious intentions of individual journalists but by institutional systems shaping the production of information itself. Even well-meaning reporters operate within environments governed by ownership structures, advertising pressures, sourcing dependencies, ideological assumptions, and professional incentives that reward conformity and punish dissent. The rise of digital technologies and social media has not fundamentally altered these dynamics. While the internet initially appeared to promise democratized communication and decentralized information, corporate power has rapidly colonized digital space. Major technology companies now function as global gatekeepers controlling algorithms, search visibility, advertising markets, surveillance infrastructures, and

social communication networks. Online discourse is heavily influenced by targeted advertising, data analytics, platform monopolies, and algorithmic prioritization designed to maximize profitability and political stability. The digital environment therefore intensifies rather than abolishes propaganda dynamics by enabling unprecedented forms of surveillance, behavioral prediction, and psychological manipulation.

MacLeod concludes that understanding contemporary politics requires recognizing propaganda not as an anomaly but as a structural necessity within capitalist democracies. Modern media systems organize perception itself, directing attention away from systemic critiques and toward narratives compatible with elite interests. Citizens may believe themselves free because they can choose between numerous channels, platforms, and opinions, yet the overall spectrum of acceptable discourse remains tightly controlled by concentrated economic and political power. Propaganda succeeds most effectively when it becomes invisible, appearing not as manipulation but as ordinary reality itself. The text ultimately presents the struggle over media as inseparable from the struggle over democracy itself. As corporate concentration deepens and digital propaganda technologies become increasingly sophisticated, critical media literacy becomes essential for resisting ideological domination. Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model remains profoundly relevant because it exposes the hidden structural forces shaping public consciousness and reveals how modern societies manufacture obedience while preserving the illusion of freedom. Through this analysis, MacLeod argues that genuine democratic transformation requires not merely reforming journalism but fundamentally challenging the systems of concentrated power that govern the production of information in the modern world.

MacLeod, A. (2024) 'Introduction: Propaganda in the Information Age', in MacLeod, A. (ed.) Propaganda in the Information Age: Still Manufacturing Consent. London: Pluto Press.

The Machinery of Illusion / The Discipline of Perception

Alan MacLeod in *Propaganda in the Information Age: Still Manufacturing Consent* and the interview with Noam Chomsky revisit the foundations of the Propaganda Model while demonstrating its enduring relevance in the digital age. The discussion reveals that despite technological innovations, social media expansion, and the apparent democratization of communication, the structural foundations of propaganda remain fundamentally unchanged. Modern media systems continue to operate within a framework dominated by concentrated ownership, corporate interests, state influence, advertising dependency, ideological conformity, and the systematic marginalization of dissenting voices. Chomsky explains that the original development of Manufacturing Consent emerged from Edward Herman's extensive institutional analysis of corporate media structures and the relationship between the press, economic power, and government authority. Herman focused on the underlying architecture of media systems, examining how ownership patterns, political alliances, and economic imperatives shape the production of information itself. Chomsky's own contributions concentrated more heavily on Vietnam, media criticism, and the ideological dimensions of journalism. Together, they constructed not merely a critique of biased reporting but a broader theory explaining why media institutions consistently reproduce elite interests while presenting themselves as independent guardians of democratic truth.

The interview emphasizes that the strongest reaction against Manufacturing Consent came not from openly authoritarian forces but from mainstream journalists themselves. Chomsky notes that many reporters were deeply offended by the suggestion that they could honestly believe

themselves independent while unconsciously operating within ideological frameworks defined by state and corporate power. Journalists preferred to imagine themselves as fearless adversaries of authority rather than as professionals functioning inside institutional systems that shape the limits of acceptable discourse. Chomsky recalls how critics attempted to dismiss the book without seriously engaging with its evidence, particularly regarding the comparison between the enormous coverage devoted to a murdered Polish priest and the near invisibility of murdered religious figures in Central America. The asymmetry of coverage reflected what Herman and Chomsky described as the distinction between “worthy” and “unworthy” victims. Victims associated with enemy states receive intense moral attention because their suffering serves geopolitical objectives, while victims connected to allied governments or Western-backed regimes are marginalized because their visibility would undermine official narratives. The media therefore constructs a moral hierarchy in which human suffering acquires political value only when it reinforces dominant ideological frameworks. The conversation then turns toward the transformations introduced by the internet and digital communication. Chomsky rejects the widespread belief that social media fundamentally overturned the structures identified in the Propaganda Model. While platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have increased the speed and volume of communication, they have not displaced mainstream institutions as the primary producers of authoritative narratives. Social media often functions merely as a transmission mechanism through which corporate media content circulates more rapidly. Although the internet provides space for alternative voices, these spaces frequently become fragmented ideological bubbles reinforcing preexisting assumptions rather than producing substantial investigative journalism capable of challenging concentrated power. Chomsky insists that the major newspapers, television networks, and corporate media organizations remain the dominant agenda-setters within the communication environment. Even digital platforms depend heavily upon mainstream media institutions to establish legitimacy and authority. As a result, the internet has not abolished propaganda structures but has instead intensified the circulation of narratives already shaped by elite institutions.

The interview pays particular attention to the rise of technological monopolies such as Google, Facebook, Amazon, and other digital corporations whose influence over public consciousness now rivals or exceeds that of traditional media conglomerates. Chomsky argues that these corporations possess unprecedented power because they not only distribute information but actively monitor and shape human behavior through surveillance, algorithmic filtering, and targeted advertising. Their business models rely upon the constant collection of user data, allowing them to predict, manipulate, and direct public attention with extraordinary precision. This informational control creates immense dangers for democratic societies because a small number of corporations can determine what billions of people see, discuss, fear, and believe. Chomsky stresses that no institution should possess such concentrated authority over communication and perception. The relationship between these corporations and state institutions further intensifies these dangers. Examples such as Amazon’s connections with intelligence agencies reveal the extent to which technological monopolies and government power increasingly overlap. Yet these relationships rarely receive sustained critical attention in mainstream journalism because exposing them would challenge the legitimacy of the very structures upon which dominant media systems depend. Another major theme of the interview concerns the transformation of ideological filtering after the Cold War. Chomsky explains that while anti-communism served as the primary ideological mechanism during the twentieth century, new enemy constructions now perform a similar function. Anti-Russian narratives, for example, increasingly dominate media discourse and are frequently used to delegitimize dissenting perspectives. Journalists, activists, and political figures questioning mainstream assumptions are often portrayed as sympathetic to hostile foreign powers

or accused of spreading foreign propaganda. Chomsky points to figures such as Glenn Greenwald and Jeremy Corbyn, who were repeatedly associated with Russian influence simply for criticizing establishment narratives. This process redirects public attention away from structural issues such as corporate domination, militarism, environmental collapse, and inequality while encouraging populations to focus upon external enemies. The ideological filter therefore continues to function as a mechanism for maintaining elite consensus by constructing moral divisions between acceptable and unacceptable political positions.

The discussion of Syria further illustrates the selective logic governing media coverage of war and international conflict. Chomsky acknowledges that serious reporting on Syria exists but remains marginalized within mainstream American journalism. Reporters such as Patrick Cockburn and Robert Fisk provided more nuanced analyses of the conflict, including the roles played by regional actors and Western allies, yet such perspectives rarely dominated media narratives. Mainstream coverage frequently simplified the conflict into moral binaries compatible with Western geopolitical interests while minimizing uncomfortable realities such as Turkey's attacks on Kurdish populations or the broader strategic calculations shaping the war. The selective visibility of certain atrocities and the silence surrounding others demonstrates how propaganda functions through omission as much as through explicit distortion. The media does not necessarily fabricate events entirely; rather, it structures perception by determining which realities become visible, emotionally significant, and politically meaningful. The interview also explores the rise of "fake news," sensationalism, and clickbait within digital communication environments. Chomsky argues that propaganda and misinformation are not new phenomena, but the contemporary media system amplifies them at unprecedented scale and speed. Sensationalism increasingly dominates journalism because corporate media institutions prioritize audience engagement, emotional stimulation, and profitability over serious investigation or structural analysis. Coverage of Donald Trump provides a clear example of this tendency. The media focused obsessively upon Trump's personality, scandals, and inflammatory rhetoric because these stories generated enormous attention and advertising revenue. Meanwhile, far more consequential issues such as climate change, deregulation, corporate influence, militarization, and attacks on democratic institutions often received comparatively superficial treatment. Spectacle therefore displaces substance, reducing political discourse to entertainment while shielding deeper structures of power from critical examination.

Economic pressures within journalism further reinforce these tendencies. Chomsky explains that shrinking newsroom budgets, declining revenues, and increasing corporate concentration have severely weakened investigative reporting. As media organizations become more financially dependent upon advertisers and audience metrics, sensational content becomes more economically attractive than time-consuming investigative work. The second filter of the Propaganda Model—advertising dependence—thus becomes even more powerful under conditions of media crisis. Journalism increasingly serves market imperatives rather than democratic responsibilities. News organizations prioritize profitability, brand management, and emotional engagement while reducing investments in serious reporting capable of challenging elite interests. Throughout the interview, Chomsky repeatedly returns to the central insight underlying Manufacturing Consent: propaganda in liberal democracies functions primarily through structural conditions rather than direct censorship. Journalists may sincerely believe themselves objective and independent while unconsciously reproducing elite assumptions because the institutional environment itself determines what appears credible, reasonable, and professionally acceptable. The media therefore manufactures consent not by imposing rigid authoritarian control but by shaping the boundaries of

discourse within which public debate occurs. Individuals are permitted vigorous disagreement over tactical matters while fundamental assumptions regarding capitalism, militarism, nationalism, and corporate power remain largely unquestioned.

The interview concludes by reaffirming that the Propaganda Model remains profoundly relevant despite technological transformation. Social media, digital communication, and online platforms have altered the mechanics of information distribution, yet concentrated economic and political power continues to dominate the production of reality itself. Corporate monopolies, state institutions, advertisers, and ideological frameworks still shape what populations know and how they interpret the world around them. The struggle for democratic communication therefore remains inseparable from broader struggles against concentrated power and systemic inequality. Chomsky insists that understanding propaganda structurally is essential not only for analyzing journalism but for defending the possibility of meaningful democratic life in an era increasingly dominated by surveillance, corporate consolidation, and ideological manipulation.

MacLeod, A. (2024) 'Still Manufacturing Consent: An Interview with Noam Chomsky', in MacLeod, A. (ed.) Propaganda in the Information Age: Still Manufacturing Consent. London: Pluto Press.

The Algorithmic Curtain / The Architecture of Manufactured Reality

Florian Zollmann in *A Propaganda Model for the Twenty-First Century* revisits and expands Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model by demonstrating that the fundamental mechanisms shaping media behavior remain deeply embedded within the structures of state-capitalism, even as digital technologies and fragmented communication systems transform the appearance of public discourse. Zollmann argues that although contemporary media environments appear more decentralized and pluralistic due to the rise of online platforms, social media, and algorithmic communication, the institutional foundations governing information production continue to operate according to the same elite-driven logic identified decades earlier in *Manufacturing Consent*. The chapter insists that the Propaganda Model has become even more relevant in the twenty-first century because corporate concentration, digital surveillance, ideological management, and technological control have intensified rather than weakened the structural domination of media systems by political and economic elites. While the surface forms of communication have evolved dramatically, the deeper institutional imperatives governing news production remain fundamentally unchanged.

Zollmann begins by tracing the intellectual origins of the Propaganda Model to Edward Herman's earlier critiques of liberal gatekeeper theories. Traditional gatekeeper research focused primarily on newsroom dynamics, professional routines, and individual journalistic decisions, examining how editors and reporters selected stories according to institutional norms and organizational pressures. Herman expanded beyond these limited perspectives by situating journalism within the larger structures of corporate capitalism and state power. Rather than treating media behavior as the product of isolated professional decisions, Herman argued that news systems are embedded within political-economic institutions whose ownership structures, regulatory frameworks, profit motives, and relationships with state authority fundamentally shape the boundaries of acceptable discourse. Media performance therefore reflects the interests and assumptions of the larger systems within which journalism operates. Zollmann emphasizes that this institutional approach remains indispensable because contemporary media organizations continue to function as integral components of global capitalist power rather than independent democratic forums devoted to

public enlightenment. The chapter demonstrates that the original five filters identified by Herman and Chomsky—ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak, and ideology—continue to organize contemporary media performance despite the rise of digital communication technologies. Corporate ownership remains increasingly concentrated, with a small number of transnational conglomerates controlling substantial portions of global information production. Although audiences consume content through fragmented digital platforms, the actual production of authoritative narratives continues to depend heavily upon traditional institutions linked to concentrated economic power. Even supposedly alternative online platforms often rely upon wealthy sponsors, venture capital, or billionaire ownership structures, thereby reproducing the same dependencies and ideological constraints found within older corporate media systems. The apparent diversity of digital communication masks a deeper concentration of institutional power in which elite-controlled platforms dominate the circulation of information on a global scale.

Advertising dependency remains equally central to media behavior. Zollmann explains that although traditional newspapers and broadcasters have lost advertising revenue to digital monopolies such as Google and Facebook, journalism itself remains profoundly subordinated to commercial imperatives. News organizations facing declining profits have responded with newsroom downsizing, reductions in investigative reporting, and increasing dependence upon inexpensive pre-packaged content supplied by corporations, governments, public relations firms, and official institutions. Economic pressures push journalists toward efficiency rather than critical inquiry, reinforcing a communication environment dominated by recycled narratives and institutional talking points. Advertising therefore continues to function not simply as a funding mechanism but as a structural discipline shaping which perspectives can survive economically within the media marketplace. Content that threatens corporate interests or challenges dominant economic assumptions becomes increasingly marginalized because profitability depends upon maintaining relationships with advertisers and elite institutions. Sourcing practices also remain deeply connected to elite power. Although digital technologies theoretically provide journalists with access to a wider range of perspectives through platforms such as Twitter and other online networks, economic realities continue to encourage reliance upon official sources. Governments, corporations, think tanks, military institutions, and public relations agencies possess the resources necessary to generate continuous flows of information tailored to journalistic routines and deadlines. As newsroom budgets shrink and reporting staffs decline, journalists become even more dependent upon these powerful institutions for timely, credible, and easily accessible material. Official narratives therefore retain privileged status within news production because they satisfy organizational demands for efficiency and legitimacy. Zollmann argues that technological expansion has not displaced this dependence but has instead strengthened it by overwhelming journalists with informational abundance while simultaneously reducing the resources required for independent verification and investigation.

The discussion of flak demonstrates how disciplinary pressures have evolved within digital communication systems. In the original Propaganda Model, flak referred to negative responses such as lawsuits, complaints, organized campaigns, and political pressure directed against media organizations deviating from acceptable ideological frameworks. Zollmann explains that digital technologies have dramatically intensified these mechanisms. Online harassment campaigns, smear operations, coordinated social media attacks, algorithmic suppression, and digital disinformation campaigns now operate alongside traditional forms of institutional pressure. Governments and powerful organizations increasingly employ sophisticated digital strategies to intimidate critics, suppress whistleblowers, and shape public narratives. Flak no longer depends

solely upon formal institutional structures; it now circulates rapidly through networked communication environments where coordinated outrage and reputational destruction can be mobilized instantaneously against dissenting voices. These pressures reinforce conformity within journalism by raising the professional, financial, and personal costs associated with challenging dominant power structures. The ideological filter has also adapted to changing geopolitical realities. Whereas anti-communism functioned as the central legitimizing ideology during the Cold War, contemporary media systems increasingly revolve around the promotion of neoliberal capitalism, free-market orthodoxy, and humanitarian militarism. Zollmann notes that military interventions are frequently framed as moral crusades for democracy, human rights, or humanitarian protection, thereby obscuring underlying geopolitical and economic interests. The ideological language may shift according to historical circumstances, but its structural function remains constant: to justify elite policies while delegitimizing alternative perspectives. Contemporary ideological frameworks normalize privatization, deregulation, corporate globalization, surveillance, militarization, and endless interventionist warfare by presenting them as natural, inevitable, or morally necessary. Media narratives reinforce these assumptions through repetition, selective framing, and the systematic exclusion of perspectives challenging dominant institutional arrangements.

One of the chapter's most significant contributions involves expanding the Propaganda Model to include technology itself as an additional filter. Zollmann argues that algorithmic systems now play a decisive role in structuring public consciousness. Social media platforms employ algorithms designed primarily to maximize engagement, emotional stimulation, advertising revenue, and user retention rather than democratic deliberation or public understanding. Sensationalism, outrage, fear, and polarization are therefore systematically amplified because they generate profitable patterns of user interaction. Algorithmic systems shape visibility itself by determining which content becomes prominent and which disappears into obscurity. Although these systems often appear neutral or technical, they are embedded within corporate business models prioritizing profit maximization and behavioral manipulation. Technology thus functions not as an independent force but as a structural extension of capitalist communication systems reinforcing existing inequalities of visibility, influence, and ideological power. Zollmann further expands the model by incorporating gender and race as essential dimensions shaping media production and representation. Media institutions remain overwhelmingly dominated by white male leadership structures, and these demographic realities significantly influence editorial priorities, sourcing patterns, and narrative framing. Women and racial minorities continue to be underrepresented in influential journalistic roles, while their experiences and perspectives are frequently marginalized or stereotyped within mainstream reporting. This structural imbalance affects not only workplace representation but also the very construction of social reality within media narratives. Stories involving marginalized communities are often filtered through elite assumptions and institutional biases that reproduce existing social hierarchies. By integrating race and gender into the Propaganda Model, Zollmann demonstrates that propaganda functions not solely through class and economic power but also through broader systems of cultural domination embedded within capitalist societies.

The chapter ultimately argues that the apparent fragmentation of digital communication should not be mistaken for genuine democratization. While the internet creates opportunities for alternative media and dissenting voices, the underlying structures governing visibility, legitimacy, funding, and distribution remain heavily concentrated in the hands of corporate and political elites. New technologies have altered the speed, scale, and methods through which propaganda operates, but

they have not abolished the institutional conditions identified by Herman and Chomsky. On the contrary, algorithmic governance, digital monopolies, surveillance capitalism, and platform dependency have intensified many of the structural pressures shaping journalism and public discourse. Zollmann concludes that the Propaganda Model remains indispensable for understanding contemporary communication systems precisely because it focuses attention upon structural power rather than superficial technological change. The persistence of concentrated ownership, advertising dependency, elite sourcing, digital flak, and ideological management demonstrates that media institutions continue to function primarily as instruments for reproducing elite interests and stabilizing existing hierarchies of power. Expanding the model to incorporate technology, gender, and race provides a more comprehensive understanding of how modern propaganda systems operate across intersecting dimensions of domination. The chapter therefore presents the twenty-first-century media environment not as a liberated marketplace of ideas but as an increasingly sophisticated architecture of manufactured perception designed to sustain political, economic, and cultural inequality.

Zollmann, F. (2020) 'A Propaganda Model for the Twenty-First Century', in MacLeod, A. (ed.) Propaganda in the Information Age: Still Manufacturing Consent. London: Pluto Press.

The Digital Iron Veil / The Filters of Invisible Power

Alan MacLeod in *Assessing the Strength of the Five Filters Today* revisits Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model in order to evaluate whether the structural mechanisms identified in *Manufacturing Consent* still function within the radically transformed communication environment of the twenty-first century. MacLeod argues that although the rise of the internet, social media, and digital communication has altered the appearance of media systems, the fundamental structures through which elite power shapes public perception remain not only intact but considerably strengthened. Contrary to optimistic claims that digital technologies would democratize communication and weaken centralized media power, MacLeod demonstrates that ownership concentration, advertising dependency, elite sourcing, ideological framing, and disciplinary flak have adapted successfully to the digital environment. The result is a communication order in which propaganda has become more decentralized in appearance while simultaneously more concentrated and sophisticated in operation. The chapter therefore insists that the Propaganda Model remains indispensable for understanding how modern media continue to manufacture consent on behalf of corporate and state power.

MacLeod begins by emphasizing that democratic societies cannot rely upon overt coercion in the same way as openly authoritarian systems. Whereas dictatorships often employ direct censorship, violence, and centralized state propaganda, liberal democracies depend upon subtler forms of ideological management that cultivate public consent rather than merely enforcing obedience. Herman and Chomsky argued that propaganda within Western democracies functions precisely because citizens believe themselves to be free participants in an open communication environment. The illusion of independent journalism conceals the deeper structural realities through which elite interests shape public consciousness. Media institutions therefore function not as neutral conveyors of information but as systems that channel perception toward frameworks favorable to dominant economic and political groups. MacLeod maintains that this process has become even more effective within digital communication systems because the mechanisms of control are less visible while simultaneously more pervasive. The chapter acknowledges that many scholars and commentators have questioned whether the original five filters still apply in an era dominated by

social media, online journalism, and citizen-produced content. Some critics argue that the low costs associated with creating websites, blogs, podcasts, and online platforms have undermined the monopolistic control once exercised by traditional media corporations. Others claim that digital communication allows ordinary individuals to bypass elite gatekeepers, weakening official sourcing structures and diminishing the power of flak. MacLeod carefully examines these arguments but ultimately concludes that they misunderstand how structural power adapts to technological change. While the internet has undoubtedly transformed the mechanics of communication, it has not fundamentally altered the concentration of economic and institutional power governing the circulation of information.

MacLeod demonstrates that traditional media institutions continue to dominate digital communication environments despite the proliferation of online platforms. Newspapers and television networks may have experienced declining audiences and financial instability, but the largest online news sites remain overwhelmingly controlled by established corporate organizations such as CNN, The New York Times, and The Washington Post. These institutions possess the resources, infrastructure, branding, and visibility necessary to dominate search algorithms, social media feeds, and advertising systems. Independent blogs and alternative outlets exist in abundance, yet most struggle to attract large audiences or sustainable revenue. Moreover, online communication itself increasingly depends upon centralized digital monopolies such as Google, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, which function as gatekeepers controlling visibility, discoverability, and distribution. The internet has therefore not eliminated concentrated media power but has instead transferred it into new corporate forms dominated by technologically advanced monopolies with unprecedented influence over information flows. Ownership remains the most powerful and decisive filter shaping contemporary media systems. MacLeod notes that when Herman and Chomsky wrote *Manufacturing Consent*, approximately fifty corporations dominated American media. By the late 1980s this number had already fallen dramatically, and contemporary media concentration has become even more extreme. A handful of massive conglomerates now control the overwhelming majority of media production across television, publishing, film, digital platforms, telecommunications, and online advertising. Corporations such as Disney, Comcast, News Corporation, Time Warner, and National Amusements exercise enormous influence over cultural production and public discourse. At the same time, digital monopolies such as Google and Facebook have achieved extraordinary dominance over online communication itself. These corporations do not merely distribute information; they structure the conditions under which visibility, legitimacy, and public attention become possible. Ownership concentration therefore continues to narrow the range of acceptable perspectives while reinforcing elite ideological consensus across multiple communication platforms simultaneously.

Advertising dependency remains equally central within contemporary media systems. Although advertising has shifted increasingly toward digital platforms, its disciplinary function has only intensified. Media organizations remain financially dependent upon corporate sponsors whose economic interests shape editorial priorities and narrative boundaries. Advertisers favor stable, commercially attractive environments that avoid controversy threatening corporate legitimacy or consumer confidence. Consequently, media outlets frequently avoid stories that challenge capitalist structures, criticize major advertisers, or question dominant economic assumptions. MacLeod emphasizes that the growth of native advertising, sponsored content, product placement, influencer marketing, and algorithmically targeted advertising has blurred the boundaries between journalism and commercial persuasion to an unprecedented degree. The distinction between information and advertising increasingly dissolves within digital environments designed primarily

to maximize engagement, clicks, and consumption. As traditional advertising revenues decline, media outlets become even more dependent upon sensationalism, clickbait, emotional polarization, and algorithmic optimization in order to survive economically. Commercial imperatives therefore penetrate deeper into journalistic practice, subordinating public service to market logic. The third filter, sourcing, remains deeply embedded within contemporary journalism despite technological changes promising greater informational diversity. MacLeod explains that newsroom downsizing, reduced investigative budgets, and accelerated production cycles have intensified journalists' dependence upon official government, corporate, and institutional sources. Powerful organizations possess the resources necessary to produce continuous streams of press releases, expert commentary, research reports, public relations material, and professionally managed information subsidies that journalists can incorporate rapidly into news production. In contrast, independent voices, grassroots organizations, marginalized communities, and dissident perspectives lack comparable institutional infrastructure. Economic pressures therefore encourage journalists to rely increasingly upon established sources deemed authoritative, credible, and efficient. Even within social media environments overflowing with alternative information, institutional legitimacy continues to privilege elite voices while marginalizing perspectives lacking official recognition. As a result, contemporary journalism often reproduces the assumptions and priorities of governments, corporations, think tanks, military institutions, and elite policy networks without substantial independent scrutiny.

MacLeod further demonstrates that flak has evolved into an even more aggressive and immediate mechanism of discipline within digital communication systems. Traditionally, flak referred to organized complaints, lawsuits, pressure campaigns, regulatory threats, and institutional backlash directed against media organizations or journalists deviating from accepted ideological boundaries. In the digital age, flak now includes online harassment campaigns, coordinated social media attacks, reputational smears, cyber intimidation, trolling operations, and algorithmically amplified outrage. The speed and scale of digital communication enable powerful actors to mobilize pressure instantaneously against dissenting journalists, whistleblowers, academics, activists, and alternative media outlets. Public criticism becomes weaponized through networked outrage capable of threatening careers, reputations, advertising relationships, and institutional legitimacy. The pervasive visibility of digital communication intensifies self-censorship because journalists understand that any deviation from dominant narratives may provoke immediate backlash from coordinated political or corporate interests. Digital flak therefore functions as a powerful mechanism encouraging conformity and discouraging critical inquiry. The ideological filter identified originally as anti-communism has also transformed rather than disappeared. MacLeod argues that following the collapse of the Soviet Union, new ideological frameworks emerged to fulfill similar functions within public discourse. The "war on terror," anti-Russian narratives, and broader constructions of external enemies now operate as mechanisms for organizing public fear, mobilizing nationalism, and marginalizing dissent. These ideological frameworks establish moral binaries dividing the world into civilized defenders of democracy and dangerous enemies threatening social order. Critical perspectives challenging military intervention, surveillance expansion, neoliberal globalization, or geopolitical aggression are frequently stigmatized as unpatriotic, extremist, or aligned with hostile foreign powers. The ideological filter therefore continues to shape the limits of acceptable political debate by directing public anxiety toward approved enemies while diverting attention from structural inequalities, corporate domination, and systemic crises within capitalist societies themselves.

One of the chapter's most important contributions involves challenging the optimistic mythology surrounding the internet as a democratizing force. MacLeod argues that although digital communication lowers technical barriers to publication, genuine influence within public discourse still depends upon economic resources, institutional backing, algorithmic visibility, and corporate infrastructure. Independent journalism may technically exist online, but it competes within communication systems overwhelmingly dominated by massive corporations controlling platforms, advertising networks, search engines, and audience attention. Furthermore, many influential online commentators, influencers, and alternative outlets themselves rely upon wealthy patrons, corporate sponsorships, venture capital, or algorithmic incentives aligned with sensationalism and ideological polarization. The internet therefore reproduces many of the same structural inequalities characteristic of traditional media systems while intensifying informational fragmentation and emotional manipulation. MacLeod concludes that the Propaganda Model remains profoundly relevant precisely because the structural conditions identified by Herman and Chomsky have intensified rather than weakened within digital capitalism. Ownership concentration has accelerated, advertising pressures have deepened, sourcing dependence has expanded, flak has become more immediate and pervasive, and ideological management has adapted successfully to new geopolitical conditions. The digital revolution has not dismantled elite control over communication but has instead produced new mechanisms for shaping public perception, disciplining dissent, and manufacturing consent. The appearance of infinite informational diversity conceals the persistence of concentrated economic power governing visibility, legitimacy, and narrative authority. In this sense, modern propaganda functions not through overt censorship but through the systematic organization of attention, emotion, and discourse within communication systems increasingly dominated by corporate and state interests.

MacLeod, A. (2020) 'Assessing the Strength of the Five Filters Today', in MacLeod, A. (ed.) Propaganda in the Information Age: Still Manufacturing Consent. London: Pluto Press.

The Spectacle Machine: Cinema Beneath the Flag

In the interview *Expanding the Propaganda Model to the Entertainment Industry*, Matthew Alford and Alan MacLeod examine how Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model extends far beyond journalism into the vast cultural terrain of Hollywood cinema, television, sports, and digital entertainment. Alford argues that the entertainment industry functions as a crucial ideological apparatus within modern capitalist societies, shaping public perception through narratives that normalize militarism, neoliberalism, state violence, and national exceptionalism. While traditional applications of the Propaganda Model focused primarily on news organizations, this discussion demonstrates that fiction, spectacle, and popular culture may be equally powerful tools for manufacturing consent because they operate through emotion, fantasy, identification, and repetition rather than through explicit political commentary. Entertainment media therefore become a subtle but highly effective mechanism through which dominant institutions reinforce ideological conformity while masking the structural realities of corporate and state power.

Alford explains that the Propaganda Model remains highly useful as a conceptual framework for understanding how media institutions align themselves with what he calls the "state-corporate nexus" dominating Western societies. Concentrated ownership, dependence upon advertising, reliance on government cooperation, ideological framing, and institutional pressure all contribute to the creation of narratives portraying the state as fundamentally benevolent, rational, and morally justified even when engaging in war, surveillance, torture, or geopolitical aggression. Hollywood

cinema, much like corporate news media, narrows the boundaries of acceptable discourse by reinforcing assumptions favorable to elite power while marginalizing perspectives that fundamentally challenge state legitimacy or capitalist structures. Although films occasionally criticize corruption, incompetence, or individual abuses, they rarely question the foundational myths underlying military intervention, American exceptionalism, or neoliberal ideology itself. The interview emphasizes that the United States government, particularly through the Department of Defense and intelligence agencies such as the CIA, has exercised direct influence over entertainment production for decades. Alford refers to this relationship as “national security cinema,” describing a communication system in which government agencies collaborate actively with filmmakers to shape narratives favorable to military and geopolitical interests. The Department of Defense provides filmmakers with access to military bases, equipment, aircraft, personnel, technical expertise, and logistical support in exchange for script approval and narrative control. Productions receiving military assistance must remove or alter scenes that portray the armed forces negatively or challenge the legitimacy of military power. This arrangement effectively transforms portions of the entertainment industry into extensions of state public relations and psychological operations.

Alford cites numerous examples demonstrating the depth of this collaboration. Films such as *The Green Berets*, *Black Hawk Down*, *Iron Man*, *Transformers*, and *Mission: Impossible* received direct support from the Department of Defense, which intervened extensively in script development and production decisions. Even television programming not explicitly focused on warfare has become subject to military influence. Alford recounts research conducted at the Department of Defense Film Collection at Georgetown University, revealing Pentagon involvement in mainstream entertainment programs such as *Home Improvement*, where military cooperation was used to present the armed forces as progressive, modern, and socially inclusive. These interventions demonstrate that state influence extends beyond overt military propaganda into broader efforts to normalize institutional authority and improve public perceptions of government power. The ideological impact of entertainment media becomes especially powerful because audiences often consume fictional narratives emotionally rather than analytically. Alford notes that films and television shape public attitudes toward war, torture, foreign nations, and political authority in subtle yet significant ways. He references a study by Erin Kearns and Joseph Young demonstrating that exposure to torture scenes in the television series *24* increased audience support for real-world torture practices. Such findings reveal how entertainment can normalize extreme violence and legitimize state abuses by embedding them within emotionally compelling narratives centered on fear, heroism, and national security. Popular culture therefore becomes a psychological training ground conditioning audiences to accept policies and practices that might otherwise appear morally unacceptable.

The interview also challenges the common perception that Hollywood operates as a fundamentally liberal or anti-establishment institution. Although many Hollywood figures support liberal political candidates or progressive social causes, Alford argues that this superficial liberalism rarely extends to meaningful opposition against militarism, empire, or corporate capitalism. Hollywood frequently portrays conservative villains, corrupt businessmen, or extremist figures as threats to democracy while simultaneously reinforcing the legitimacy of American state power and military intervention. The entertainment industry’s alignment with the broader ideological assumptions of the military-industrial complex ensures that films remain compatible with dominant geopolitical narratives even when presenting themselves as critical or rebellious. Hollywood liberalism therefore functions less as genuine dissent than as a mechanism for renewing

the legitimacy of the existing political order. Alford highlights the historical repression of genuinely dissident voices within the entertainment industry, noting the FBI's campaign against Charlie Chaplin as one example of how state institutions actively suppress artists challenging dominant ideologies. The history of blacklists, surveillance, intimidation, and political pressure within Hollywood reveals that cultural production has long been treated as a strategic domain requiring ideological management. Entertainment industries are not neutral spaces of artistic freedom but contested arenas in which state and corporate interests seek to shape collective consciousness through carefully managed narratives and symbolic imagery.

The discussion further explores how Hollywood contributes to the demonization of foreign nations and populations in ways that prepare public opinion for military intervention or geopolitical hostility. Films often portray designated enemy states as irrational, barbaric, corrupt, or uniquely evil while simplifying complex historical realities into moralized narratives of good versus evil. Alford points to productions such as *Hotel Rwanda*, which frame international crises in ways that obscure or minimize Western involvement and responsibility. Through repeated cinematic patterns, audiences absorb assumptions about which nations deserve sympathy, intervention, or destruction. Popular culture thus becomes a crucial instrument in constructing geopolitical enemies and legitimizing foreign policy objectives through emotional storytelling rather than explicit propaganda. A recurring theme throughout the interview is Hollywood's persistent portrayal of the American state as fundamentally virtuous. Even when films acknowledge corruption, abuse, or institutional failure, they typically depict such problems as temporary deviations caused by isolated individuals rather than structural features of political power itself. The system ultimately corrects itself, reaffirming faith in American institutions and democratic mythology. Alford describes how the Department of Defense intervened directly in productions such as *Hulk* to remove references connecting the military to chemical warfare during the Vietnam War. Such interventions reveal the determination of state agencies to preserve narratives of moral legitimacy and institutional benevolence within popular entertainment.

The interview also examines the growing role of corporate advertising and product placement within entertainment media. Product placement allows corporations to integrate commercial messaging seamlessly into narrative environments, further blurring distinctions between storytelling and advertising. Alford explains that although advertisers may not rewrite entire scripts, they often refuse participation in productions portraying their products or industries negatively. Entertainment media therefore operate within commercial ecosystems where ideological compatibility with corporate interests becomes economically advantageous. Streaming platforms such as Netflix may offer somewhat greater flexibility because they depend less directly upon traditional advertising models, yet they still reflect the broader class interests and ideological assumptions of wealthy ownership structures and global capitalist markets. The expansion of military influence into sports and video games demonstrates how propaganda increasingly permeates leisure culture itself. Alford notes that the Department of Defense has paid millions to professional sports organizations such as the NFL for patriotic spectacles like "Salutes to Service," transforming sporting events into rituals of militarized nationalism. Video games such as *Call of Duty* and *America's Army* similarly function as recruitment and ideological conditioning tools that familiarize players with militarized worldviews while glamorizing technological warfare and military heroism. Although the military does not control every aspect of gaming culture, its influence within major franchises contributes to the normalization of permanent warfare and the emotional integration of militarism into everyday entertainment consumption.

The interview concludes by discussing “national product placement,” in which governments collaborate with entertainment industries to improve national image and tourism. Productions such as *Australia* and *Spectre* were shaped through cooperation with national governments seeking to present idealized portrayals of their societies while suppressing uncomfortable political realities. These collaborations demonstrate that propaganda within entertainment operates globally through partnerships linking governments, corporations, tourism industries, and media conglomerates in the production of sanitized national mythologies. Overall, the interview reveals that entertainment industries play a central role in maintaining ideological hegemony within contemporary capitalist societies. Hollywood, television, sports, streaming platforms, and digital gaming collectively shape emotional perception, cultural memory, and political imagination in ways deeply aligned with elite interests. While the Propaganda Model originally focused on journalism, Alford demonstrates that fiction and spectacle may be even more powerful instruments for manufacturing consent because they operate through pleasure, identification, fantasy, and repetition rather than overt political argument. Entertainment therefore becomes not merely diversion but an integral component of modern propaganda systems through which state and corporate power reproduce themselves culturally, psychologically, and emotionally across global audiences.

Alford, M. and MacLeod, A. (2020) 'Expanding the Propaganda Model to the Entertainment Industry', in MacLeod, A. (ed.) Propaganda in the Information Age: Still Manufacturing Consent. London: Pluto Press.

The Cathedral of Silence / Inside the Machinery of Consent

Matt Kennard in *Working Inside the Racket* offers a deeply personal and revealing account of how elite media institutions operate from within, exposing the subtle cultural mechanisms through which journalism becomes integrated into systems of corporate and political power. Drawing upon his years as a reporter for the *Financial Times*, Kennard argues that the modern media system functions not as an independent watchdog serving democratic accountability, but as an institutional component of what he describes as a global “racket” composed of transnational corporations, investment funds, banks, governments, and concentrations of wealth whose interests dominate public life. This racket, although largely invisible to ordinary citizens, shapes political decisions, economic systems, and international relations while relying heavily upon the mainstream media to legitimize its authority and suppress meaningful dissent. Kennard’s testimony demonstrates that propaganda in liberal democracies does not primarily operate through overt censorship or authoritarian control, but through internalized conformity, professional socialization, self-censorship, and institutional selection processes that gradually align journalists with elite assumptions long before explicit intervention becomes necessary.

Kennard begins by emphasizing that the media are themselves integral components of corporate capitalism rather than external observers critically monitoring it. Mainstream journalism is deeply embedded within networks of ownership, finance, and institutional power. Large media corporations are interconnected with banks, investment firms, advertisers, governments, and multinational corporations through ownership structures, social networks, elite educational institutions, and shared ideological assumptions. Consequently, the media do not merely defend the interests of power from the outside; they are themselves expressions of that power. Kennard notes that in both the United States and the United Kingdom, a tiny number of corporations dominate the overwhelming majority of media output, ensuring that public discourse remains confined within ideological boundaries favorable to concentrated wealth and political authority.

Yet Kennard insists that direct censorship alone cannot explain how such systems maintain ideological coherence. The most effective form of control emerges culturally through the pre-selection and socialization of individuals who unconsciously internalize elite worldviews. Herman and Chomsky observed that journalists are adapted to institutional constraints long before entering major newsrooms, and Kennard's personal experiences strongly reinforce this insight. While attending Columbia School of Journalism, he became aware that even prestigious educational institutions rarely encouraged genuine questioning of power. Elite figures such as Henry Kissinger could appear before aspiring journalists without serious confrontation regarding their involvement in war crimes, imperial violence, or state repression. When Kennard challenged Kissinger directly, he found himself isolated socially and treated as a disruptive presence rather than as someone fulfilling journalism's supposed commitment to speaking truth to power. This experience revealed to him that conformity within elite journalism operates less through formal prohibition than through social discipline, peer pressure, and the cultivation of acceptable professional behavior.

Upon joining the Financial Times, Kennard increasingly realized that journalists and the corporate-political order they covered were part of the same institutional ecosystem. The ideological assumptions underpinning mainstream journalism had already been internalized by most reporters before they entered the newsroom. Journalists generally assumed that Western governments and capitalist institutions were fundamentally benevolent even when making mistakes or committing abuses. Criticism was permitted only within carefully limited boundaries focusing on tactical errors, incompetence, or corruption rather than questioning systemic structures, geopolitical intentions, or the legitimacy of capitalist power itself. Kennard emphasizes that this form of ideological management differs fundamentally from the crude censorship associated with openly authoritarian systems. There is no need for constant direct intervention because journalists who fundamentally challenge elite assumptions rarely survive professionally within mainstream institutions. Those who adapt and conform advance, while those who resist become marginalized, labeled ideological, or excluded from prestigious positions. Kennard observed how young journalists gradually moderated their views in order to fit institutional expectations and maintain career prospects. The process resembled an ideological maturation in which youthful idealism gave way to professional conservatism shaped by newsroom culture, elite access, and institutional reward systems. Journalists quickly learned which subjects, frameworks, and narratives were acceptable and which would provoke resistance from editors or threaten professional advancement. The result was not usually deliberate lying but rather the internalization of invisible limits defining what could plausibly be written, investigated, or emphasized within elite publications. Kennard describes testing these boundaries by attempting to frame stories explicitly in terms of U.S.-backed dictatorships or imperial involvement, only to watch editors systematically remove politically sensitive language. Such editorial decisions revealed how self-censorship becomes embedded structurally within journalistic routines until the boundaries of acceptable discourse appear natural and unquestionable.

One of Kennard's most striking insights involves the way journalists unconsciously come to identify with the very institutions they imagine themselves scrutinizing. Mainstream reporters often sincerely believe they are independent critics of power because they occasionally expose scandals, corruption, or policy failures. Yet these critiques rarely challenge the foundational assumptions underlying the political and economic order itself. Journalists learn instinctively which stories are publishable and which are institutionally impossible. Kennard recounts abandoning story ideas before even pitching them because he already understood they would never survive editorial review. His experiences reporting on Haiti after the devastating 2010 earthquake

illustrate this mechanism clearly. The Financial Times focused on narratives of recovery, investment, and economic management while ignoring the deeper reality that international financial institutions and Western governments exploited the disaster to intensify privatization and neoliberal restructuring. Structural critique remained absent because it conflicted with the ideological framework underpinning elite financial journalism. Time and space constraints within modern journalism further reinforce this ideological narrowing. Mainstream reporting prioritizes brevity, speed, accessibility, and conventional assumptions, making complex structural analysis difficult to communicate within institutional formats designed for rapid consumption. Radical or unconventional perspectives require substantial explanation, historical context, and analytical depth, all of which conflict with newsroom pressures emphasizing efficiency and marketability. As a result, journalism systematically favors dominant narratives that can be communicated quickly because audiences are already culturally conditioned to recognize and accept them. The very structure of media production therefore privileges the status quo while marginalizing perspectives requiring deeper systemic critique.

Kennard also challenges the notion that supposedly liberal or progressive publications fundamentally escape these institutional constraints. After leaving the Financial Times, he hoped that outlets such as The Guardian or The New York Times might offer greater openness toward anti-capitalist or anti-imperialist analysis. Instead, he discovered that these organizations remained deeply integrated within the same corporate and ideological systems. Although liberal publications often present themselves as oppositional voices defending social justice or progressive values, they continue to depend upon wealthy ownership structures, corporate advertising, elite sourcing networks, and institutional legitimacy grounded in the same political-economic order they appear to critique. Liberal media may challenge conservative administrations or advocate limited reforms, yet they remain hostile toward perspectives fundamentally threatening international capitalism, Western geopolitical dominance, or concentrated corporate power. Kennard illustrates this pattern through media coverage of Latin American political leaders challenging neoliberal orthodoxy. Figures such as Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales, and Rafael Correa were routinely vilified within mainstream Western media because they threatened foreign investment, corporate influence, and neoliberal economic arrangements. Their social achievements in reducing poverty, expanding literacy, or empowering marginalized populations received minimal attention compared with constant portrayals emphasizing authoritarianism, corruption, or instability. By contrast, leaders aligned with international capital markets and U.S. geopolitical interests received far more favorable treatment even when implicated in severe human rights abuses. Kennard contrasts the demonization of Chávez with the sympathetic portrayal of Colombia's Álvaro Uribe despite the latter's association with extensive political violence and civilian killings. Media narratives therefore reflected not objective democratic values but the extent to which political leaders supported or challenged global capitalist structures.

The ideological priorities of elite journalism become even clearer during moments of economic or social tragedy. Kennard notes that the Financial Times often interpreted catastrophic events primarily through their implications for business confidence, investment opportunities, or market stability rather than human suffering. Coverage of the Marikana massacre in South Africa, where striking miners were killed by police, focused heavily on financial consequences rather than the lives destroyed or the structural inequalities underlying the conflict. Similarly, neoliberal austerity measures devastating poor populations were frequently described as economically "sensible" because journalism remained fundamentally oriented toward protecting investor confidence and market orthodoxy. Human consequences became secondary to the preservation of financial

stability and corporate profitability. Despite this bleak analysis, Kennard acknowledges that the rise of independent media and digital communication has begun creating openings for challenges to elite informational control. Grassroots political movements, online journalism, and alternative media platforms increasingly undermine the monopoly once exercised by traditional corporate outlets. Movements surrounding figures such as Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn revealed growing public dissatisfaction with establishment narratives and neoliberal orthodoxy. Yet Kennard remains cautious, recognizing that elite institutions continue to wield enormous power through concentrated ownership, financial resources, and ideological influence. Alternative media may weaken the system's informational dominance, but the struggle against corporate and state propaganda remains deeply uneven.

Ultimately, *Working Inside the Racket* provides a powerful insider testimony confirming many of Herman and Chomsky's central claims regarding media power and ideological control. Kennard demonstrates that mainstream journalism functions less through overt censorship than through institutional socialization, professional discipline, cultural conformity, and structural incentives shaping how journalists perceive reality itself. Elite media organizations maintain legitimacy precisely because they appear free and independent while reproducing the assumptions, interests, and priorities of concentrated wealth and political authority. The racket governing global capitalism therefore depends upon media systems that manufacture not only consent but also the very limits of political imagination, ensuring that structural critiques of power remain marginal while corporate and state interests continue to define the boundaries of public discourse.

Kennard, M. (2020) 'Working Inside the Racket: An Insider's Perspective to the Elite Media', in MacLeod, A. (ed.) Propaganda in the Information Age: Still Manufacturing Consent. London: Pluto Press.

The Digital Cage / Consent Beneath the Algorithm

Alan MacLeod in Conclusion: New Media, Same Old Rules argues that despite the revolutionary transformation of communication technologies in the twenty-first century, the fundamental structures identified by Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model remain not only intact but in many respects intensified. The emergence of the internet, social media, Big Data, and digital communication initially inspired widespread optimism that new technologies would democratize information, weaken centralized media power, and empower ordinary citizens to participate more directly in public discourse. Many believed that the collapse of traditional gatekeeping mechanisms would create a more open and pluralistic global conversation where knowledge could circulate freely beyond the control of corporations and states. Yet MacLeod demonstrates that these hopes have largely failed to materialize. Rather than dismantling systems of ideological control, digital technologies have frequently deepened existing inequalities, intensified surveillance, accelerated commercial manipulation, and strengthened the structural power of dominant elites over the flow of information.

MacLeod begins by emphasizing the paradox of the digital age. Humanity now possesses unprecedented technological capacities for communication, with billions of individuals connected instantly across national boundaries through social media platforms, search engines, online publications, and mobile technologies. Information appears infinitely accessible, and users can theoretically produce and distribute content independently without relying upon traditional institutions. However, this apparent informational freedom conceals new forms of centralized control. The internet has not eliminated propaganda but transformed its methods and expanded its

reach into everyday life. Instead of creating global solidarity, online systems have often intensified political fragmentation, nationalism, xenophobia, and social hostility. Digital communication platforms amplify emotional polarization, reward outrage and sensationalism, and encourage tribal forms of identity politics that fracture collective democratic consciousness while distracting populations from structural inequalities and concentrations of power. The expansion of surveillance capitalism represents one of the most important transformations in the contemporary media environment. MacLeod references the revelations of Edward Snowden, which exposed the deep collaboration between governments, intelligence agencies, and major technology corporations in constructing systems of mass surveillance unprecedented in human history. Companies such as Google, Facebook, Amazon, and other digital giants do not merely function as neutral communication tools; they are deeply integrated into systems of state monitoring, behavioral prediction, data extraction, and ideological management. Yasha Levine's argument that technology corporations should be understood as extensions of the surveillance state reveals the extent to which modern digital infrastructure serves political and corporate power simultaneously. Information platforms collect immense quantities of personal data, monitor user behavior continuously, and employ algorithmic systems capable of shaping what individuals see, believe, consume, and fear.

MacLeod explains that the economic foundations of journalism have also undergone a catastrophic transformation. Traditional media institutions once depended heavily upon advertising revenue tied to newspapers, magazines, and broadcast networks. The rise of internet advertising fundamentally destabilized this model by shifting enormous amounts of revenue toward digital monopolies such as Google and Facebook. Between 2005 and 2017, newspaper advertising revenue in the United States collapsed dramatically, leading to massive newsroom closures, severe budget cuts, and the elimination of countless journalistic positions. The destruction of stable funding structures for investigative reporting created a weakened media environment increasingly vulnerable to corporate propaganda, state influence, sensationalism, and superficiality. As professional journalism became economically precarious, remaining journalists faced intensifying pressure to produce rapid, marketable content under shrinking institutional resources. The reduction of newsroom staff by nearly half since 2006 has had profound consequences for the quality and independence of journalism. Fewer reporters are expected to produce greater quantities of content under accelerated deadlines, leaving little time for investigative work, critical analysis, or extensive fact-checking. Journalists become increasingly dependent upon official statements, corporate press releases, government briefings, public relations material, and pre-packaged informational subsidies provided by powerful institutions. Economic insecurity also encourages self-censorship because journalists operating within unstable employment structures are less willing to challenge political or corporate authority aggressively. MacLeod suggests that what many now describe as the crisis of "fake news" is not an accidental distortion of an otherwise healthy media system but rather the logical outcome of a commercial environment driven by profit maximization, advertising competition, audience manipulation, and declining commitments to public service journalism.

The collapse of public trust in mainstream media reflects growing awareness that contemporary journalism often fails to distinguish clearly between truth and ideological performance. MacLeod notes that global trust in news media has fallen to historically low levels, especially in countries such as the United States, France, and the United Kingdom. Large portions of the population increasingly perceive mainstream journalism as politically compromised, commercially corrupted, or detached from ordinary social realities. This distrust creates fertile conditions for demagogic

political movements, conspiratorial thinking, and attacks upon democratic institutions themselves. Figures such as Donald Trump have exploited public disillusionment by portraying the media as enemies of the people while simultaneously weaponizing distrust to consolidate authoritarian tendencies. Ironically, although establishment journalism frequently functions as a defender of elite power, attacks upon the media from right-wing populists often aim not to democratize information but to replace one system of propaganda with another more openly authoritarian and nationalist form. MacLeod argues that Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model remains indispensable precisely because it explains these developments structurally rather than morally or psychologically. Despite dramatic technological transformations, the five original filters of the propaganda model continue to shape journalism in the digital era. Ownership concentration has intensified rather than weakened. A tiny number of corporations now dominate both traditional media and digital communication infrastructure, giving unprecedented power to a handful of technology conglomerates capable of controlling global flows of information. Media ownership is more centralized than ever before, and corporations exercise influence not only over content production but also over search algorithms, social media visibility, recommendation systems, and advertising markets.

Advertising remains equally central to the survival of digital media, although its forms have evolved significantly. The boundaries separating journalism, marketing, entertainment, and propaganda have become increasingly blurred through sponsored content, influencer culture, native advertising, algorithmic targeting, and personalized data-driven advertising systems. Content production is shaped less by public interest than by the pursuit of clicks, engagement metrics, virality, and advertiser-friendly audiences. News organizations therefore prioritize emotionally stimulating or commercially attractive stories capable of generating traffic rather than pursuing investigative reporting that might challenge corporate sponsors or dominant political interests. The sourcing filter has also become more powerful within the contemporary media system. Financial pressures and shrinking newsroom resources increase dependence upon government agencies, corporate communications departments, think tanks, intelligence-linked experts, and public relations industries. Digital technologies may provide access to more voices theoretically, yet mainstream narratives continue to rely overwhelmingly upon elite institutional sources deemed authoritative and credible. Official perspectives dominate news cycles because they provide journalists with rapid, inexpensive, and institutionally validated material compatible with accelerated production schedules.

Flak has evolved dramatically in the digital environment. Whereas earlier forms of flak involved organized complaints, lawsuits, editorials, or political pressure campaigns, digital communication enables instantaneous mass harassment, coordinated trolling, online smear campaigns, algorithmic suppression, and social media mob attacks directed against dissenting journalists or alternative perspectives. Organized digital flak can now emerge globally within hours, amplifying emotional outrage while disciplining media workers into conformity. Journalists who challenge dominant geopolitical narratives frequently face accusations of disloyalty, extremism, conspiracy theorizing, or alignment with hostile foreign powers. The speed and visibility of online punishment intensify pressures toward ideological obedience. MacLeod further argues that the ideological filter identified originally as anti-communism has adapted flexibly to new geopolitical conditions. During the Cold War, anti-communism functioned as a universal framework through which dissent, social reform movements, and anti-imperialist perspectives could be delegitimized. In the contemporary era, this ideological mechanism increasingly takes the form of anti-Russian hysteria, anti-terror narratives, and broader frameworks depicting challenges to Western geopolitical

interests as threats to democracy, civilization, or global stability. Political dissenters questioning neoliberal capitalism, NATO expansion, military intervention, or intelligence narratives are frequently portrayed as foreign agents, extremists, or enemies of democratic values. Thus the ideological filter continues operating not through fixed doctrines but through adaptive mechanisms legitimizing elite power while marginalizing systemic critique.

MacLeod illustrates the continuing relevance of worthy and unworthy victims through contrasting media coverage of international events. Elections in countries challenging U.S. geopolitical interests, such as Venezuela, are routinely framed as illegitimate or authoritarian regardless of international assessments praising electoral procedures. By contrast, elections in allied states marked by violence, corruption, or repression often receive legitimizing coverage emphasizing democratic stability. Similarly, the disproportionate attention devoted to American suffering compared with the neglect of foreign victims reveals enduring hierarchies of human value embedded within Western media systems. MacLeod compares extensive coverage of the September 11 attacks with the comparatively minimal attention given to the humanitarian catastrophe following Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico, exposing how nationality, class, race, and geopolitical significance shape media visibility. Despite its origins within the study of American media, MacLeod insists that the propaganda model possesses global applicability because similar structural conditions increasingly characterize media systems worldwide. Concentrated ownership, corporate advertising dependence, elite sourcing networks, ideological discipline, and political-economic inequality dominate media institutions across Europe, Canada, Latin America, Africa, and Asia. The global spread of neoliberal capitalism has internationalized the structural pressures identified by Herman and Chomsky, creating transnational informational systems deeply integrated with financial markets, corporate interests, and geopolitical power.

Ultimately, *Conclusion: New Media, Same Old Rules* presents a sobering analysis of contemporary media power. The digital revolution did not abolish propaganda but expanded its sophistication, speed, and reach while embedding surveillance, commercialization, and ideological control more deeply into everyday communication. The propaganda model remains essential precisely because it reveals that technological innovation alone cannot democratize information so long as ownership, economic incentives, political power, and institutional structures remain concentrated in elite hands. Yet MacLeod also suggests that critical awareness remains possible. By exposing how media systems manufacture consent, marginalize dissent, and normalize inequality, scholars, journalists, and citizens can begin resisting informational domination and imagining alternative forms of democratic communication capable of serving public needs rather than elite interests.

MacLeod, A. (2020) 'Conclusion: New Media, Same Old Rules', in MacLeod, A. (ed.) Propaganda in the Information Age: Still Manufacturing Consent. London: Pluto Press.

Conclusion: The Theatre of Consent: Language at the Edge of Dissolution

The crisis explored throughout this volume reveals that propaganda in modern societies no longer functions merely as a supplementary instrument of political persuasion but has evolved into one of the central organizing principles of contemporary civilization itself. Public relations, strategic communication, advertising systems, entertainment industries, digital algorithms, and corporate media networks now operate together as an immense symbolic machinery dedicated to regulating

perception and maintaining institutional legitimacy within increasingly unstable societies. The problem confronting modern humanity is therefore not simply the existence of propaganda, since every organized society attempts to shape collective consciousness in some form, but the unprecedented scale, subtlety, and permanence through which manipulation has become embedded within everyday communication. Industrial civilization originally promised liberation through technological progress, mass literacy, and expanded democratic participation, yet the same communication technologies capable of informing populations have also enabled the emergence of systems of symbolic control operating with extraordinary psychological sophistication. The contemporary citizen lives surrounded by carefully constructed narratives, emotional cues, algorithmic recommendations, branded identities, and ideological framings that continuously shape interpretation before conscious reflection can occur. Reality itself increasingly appears through mediated filters controlled by institutions possessing immense economic and political power. This transformation has profound implications for language because words can no longer maintain stable meaning in environments where communication is subordinated to commercial competition, political management, and perpetual emotional stimulation. Language begins to decay under the pressure of strategic adaptation. Terms once connected to philosophical inquiry, ethical reflection, or democratic participation become emptied and reformulated according to institutional necessity. War becomes humanitarian intervention. Surveillance becomes security. Censorship becomes moderation. Exploitation becomes flexibility. Propaganda becomes public relations. Through endless repetition these euphemisms normalize structures of domination while obscuring the realities they conceal. The result is a civilization increasingly incapable of sustaining genuine public understanding because communication itself has been transformed into a marketplace of competing manipulations where emotional effectiveness matters more than truth. The public sphere fragments into isolated ideological tribes consuming tailored narratives reinforced continuously through digital algorithms designed to maximize engagement rather than comprehension. Citizens encounter vast quantities of information while becoming progressively detached from coherent historical memory, critical reasoning, and collective democratic discourse. In such conditions propaganda no longer appears as an external distortion imposed upon society but as the normal atmosphere through which social life itself is experienced. The distinction between information, entertainment, advertising, and ideology collapses entirely as communication systems integrate commercial and political objectives into a seamless spectacle of symbolic consumption. Modern societies therefore confront not merely a media crisis but a civilizational crisis rooted in the deterioration of language itself. When communication loses its connection to reality, democratic participation becomes theatrical performance rather than meaningful self-governance. Populations may continue voting, debating, consuming news, and expressing opinions while the boundaries of acceptable discourse remain tightly managed through institutional filters operating largely beyond public awareness. The spectacle of freedom survives while the substance of autonomy gradually disappears beneath systems of symbolic administration designed to maintain obedience without relying openly upon coercion. Public relations represents the perfected form of this transformation because it replaces direct repression with emotional management, replacing censorship with narrative saturation and replacing democratic deliberation with psychological engineering calibrated continuously through market research, surveillance technologies, and behavioral analytics. The consequences extend far beyond politics alone because propaganda reshapes not merely opinions but identities, desires, fears, aspirations, and social relationships themselves. Individuals increasingly understand themselves through commercially mediated narratives defining success, happiness, patriotism, rebellion, and even personal authenticity according to the needs of economic systems dependent upon perpetual consumption and ideological conformity. Planned obsolescence therefore extends into consciousness itself as

populations become conditioned to abandon historical continuity, moral consistency, and stable meaning in favor of constant symbolic reinvention driven by technological acceleration and market imperatives.

Digital Dominion: Algorithms, Spectacle, and the Colonization of Reality

The rise of digital communication technologies intensified the processes examined throughout this volume by creating systems capable of monitoring, predicting, and influencing human behavior on a scale previously unimaginable in history. The internet initially appeared to many observers as a revolutionary democratic force capable of decentralizing information, undermining media monopolies, and empowering ordinary citizens through unrestricted communication. Yet the evolution of digital capitalism quickly demonstrated that technological openness alone cannot guarantee democratic liberation when communication infrastructures themselves become concentrated within powerful corporate networks governed primarily by commercial interests. Platforms such as Google, Facebook, YouTube, X, Instagram, and TikTok transformed communication into a system of data extraction where human attention functions as a commodity continuously monitored, quantified, and sold to advertisers, political actors, and institutional clients seeking behavioral influence. Algorithms now determine visibility, relevance, and symbolic legitimacy within public discourse by deciding which narratives circulate widely and which remain effectively invisible. This technological mediation fundamentally alters the nature of communication because individuals no longer encounter reality directly but through automated systems optimized to maximize emotional engagement, outrage, addiction, and profitable interaction. Information flows become fragmented according to predictive behavioral models designed to maintain user dependency rather than facilitate critical understanding. The consequence is not informational abundance but communicative disorientation. The citizen exists within endless streams of disconnected images, emotional controversies, ideological spectacles, and viral distractions that erode sustained attention while amplifying tribal polarization and psychological instability. Public discourse becomes accelerated beyond the capacity for reflection. Outrage replaces analysis. Visibility replaces truth. Performance replaces dialogue. In this environment propaganda acquires unprecedented efficiency because institutions no longer need to impose singular narratives through centralized censorship. Instead they manage perception indirectly by controlling communicative environments themselves. Search rankings, trending topics, recommendation systems, sponsored content, influencer networks, artificial amplification, and algorithmic suppression shape collective awareness continuously beneath the appearance of spontaneous communication. The digital subject experiences himself as autonomous while his informational reality remains structured invisibly through technological architectures designed primarily for profit and ideological management. Surveillance capitalism thereby merges seamlessly with public relations, advertising, and political propaganda into a unified system where communication serves simultaneously as behavioral monitoring, commercial targeting, and psychological conditioning. The planned obsolescence of language accelerates dramatically within this context because digital communication rewards immediacy, emotional intensity, and symbolic simplification over complexity, historical context, or philosophical depth. Words become compressed into slogans, hashtags, memes, branding strategies, and emotionally charged fragments optimized for rapid circulation rather than reflective understanding. Meaning becomes increasingly unstable because digital economies depend upon perpetual novelty and continuous emotional stimulation. Communication loses permanence. Public memory shortens. Historical continuity dissolves beneath endless informational acceleration. This condition produces societies increasingly vulnerable to manipulation because populations deprived of coherent historical

consciousness become easier to govern through fear, distraction, and symbolic spectacle. The transformation of journalism illustrates this crisis clearly. Economic pressures, declining newsroom resources, dependence upon advertising, and competition for digital attention have weakened investigative reporting while encouraging sensationalism, clickbait, and narrative conformity. Journalists operate under immense structural constraints that incentivize reliance upon official sources, corporate press releases, and pre-packaged information subsidies supplied by governments, think tanks, military institutions, and public relations agencies. Churnalism replaces independent inquiry. The media system gradually evolves into an echo chamber recycling institutional narratives while maintaining the appearance of adversarial debate within carefully regulated ideological boundaries. Even dissent becomes commodified as spectacle, transformed into manageable content that reinforces rather than fundamentally challenges dominant systems of power. The result is a communication order where propaganda no longer functions exceptionally during crises or wartime but operates continuously through the ordinary routines of digital life itself. Every screen becomes simultaneously a marketplace, surveillance device, entertainment platform, ideological mechanism, and psychological management system integrated into the daily reproduction of social order. The citizen consumes propaganda not as identifiable doctrine but as lifestyle, entertainment, emotional habit, and informational environment. Modern power therefore achieves unprecedented subtlety precisely because it no longer appears primarily as external domination but as mediated participation within systems individuals voluntarily inhabit each day.

Fragments of Resistance: Reclaiming Meaning in the Age of Manufactured Perception

Despite the immense concentration of symbolic power described throughout this volume, the persistence of propaganda does not signify the complete triumph of institutional domination over human consciousness. Systems of manipulation remain powerful precisely because they are never fully secure. The very necessity of continuous public relations campaigns, ideological management, and narrative coordination reveals the instability underlying modern systems of authority. If elite institutions possessed uncontested legitimacy, they would not require permanent psychological maintenance on such an extraordinary scale. The expansion of propaganda therefore reflects not simply confidence but deep structural anxiety within societies increasingly fractured by inequality, technological acceleration, ecological crisis, political polarization, and widespread distrust toward institutional authority. The planned obsolescence of language produces conditions that ultimately threaten the stability of the systems benefiting from it because communication detached entirely from truth eventually undermines social cohesion itself. When populations lose confidence in media, governments, corporations, and informational institutions, democratic legitimacy deteriorates rapidly. Citizens become trapped between cynicism and manipulation, unable fully to trust official narratives yet often lacking the resources necessary to construct coherent alternatives. This condition generates profound psychological alienation because individuals experience increasing difficulty distinguishing reality from performance within environments saturated by contradictory information and strategic disinformation. Yet within this crisis also emerges the possibility for resistance. Independent journalism, alternative media networks, whistleblowers, investigative researchers, decentralized communication platforms, grassroots political movements, and critical intellectual traditions continue challenging dominant narratives despite institutional pressures designed to marginalize dissent. The digital environment, although heavily controlled by corporate power, also permits forms of communication and organization previously impossible under older centralized media systems. Exposures of state surveillance, military propaganda, corporate corruption, media manipulation, and institutional deception have circulated globally despite enormous efforts to contain them. Social movements

across different regions increasingly recognize the relationship between media concentration, economic inequality, militarism, environmental destruction, and democratic decline. These developments suggest that the struggle over communication remains historically open rather than permanently determined. Nevertheless genuine resistance requires more than simply producing alternative information. It demands confronting the deeper cultural and psychological structures sustaining propaganda within modern societies. Citizens conditioned by decades of consumerism, spectacle, and informational acceleration cannot easily recover habits of critical reflection, historical consciousness, and democratic participation without broader transformations in education, economics, and public culture itself. Reclaiming language therefore becomes inseparable from reclaiming social reality. Words must recover depth, continuity, and ethical seriousness against systems designed to fragment meaning into disposable symbolic commodities. Communication must once again serve understanding rather than manipulation, memory rather than distraction, and democratic inquiry rather than psychological administration. This requires recognizing that propaganda functions not only through lies but through the systematic narrowing of imagination itself. The greatest achievement of modern propaganda is not convincing populations to believe falsehoods absolutely but persuading them that no alternative social reality is possible beyond the structures currently dominating public life. Neoliberal capitalism, permanent militarization, corporate media monopolies, surveillance technologies, and extreme inequality are presented as inevitable conditions rather than historical arrangements subject to democratic transformation. The recovery of genuine communication therefore depends upon restoring the possibility of imagining different futures beyond the ideological limits imposed by elite-managed discourse. The struggle against propaganda ultimately becomes a struggle for human autonomy itself because societies incapable of sustaining truthful communication cannot preserve democratic freedom, moral accountability, or collective self-governance. The future of civilization may depend upon whether humanity can resist the reduction of language into an instrument of behavioral engineering and reclaim communication as a shared space for critical thought, historical understanding, and ethical responsibility. The entropy of communication examined throughout this volume represents not merely the deterioration of media systems but the gradual erosion of the symbolic foundations upon which democratic societies depend. If language collapses entirely into spectacle, branding, and strategic manipulation, then politics itself becomes impossible except as theatrical management of passive populations. Yet as long as individuals continue questioning institutional narratives, preserving historical memory, exposing hidden structures of power, and defending the possibility of truth against systems of organized deception, the struggle for authentic communication remains alive. The battle over propaganda is therefore inseparable from the broader struggle over the future of human freedom in an age increasingly governed through manufactured perception.

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